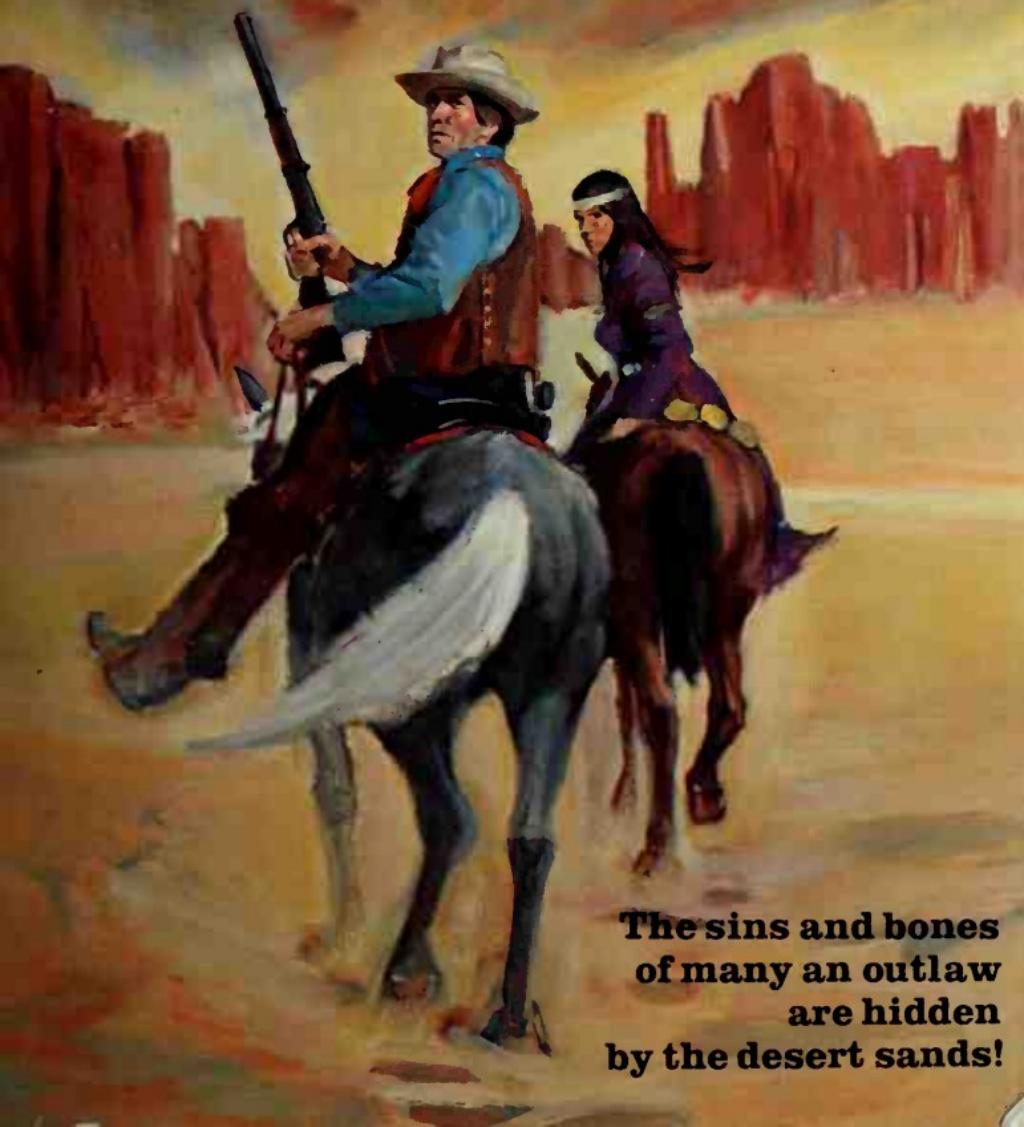


By the author of NEVADA

ZANE GREY

the greatest western ever

THE HERITAGE OF THE DESERT



The sins and bones
of many an outlaw
are hidden
by the desert sands!



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The sheep massed in a flock on a level once more, and the drivers spread to their several positions. The route lay under the bulge of red cliffs, between the base and enormous sections of wall that had broken off and fallen far out.

Dave Naab galloped back toward Jack Hare, shouting.

"The water hole's been plugged! Filled in with sand and stone!"

"Was it a cave-in?"

"Nope. There's been no rain. I found the tracks. Someone climbed up and rolled the stones and started the cave-in... just to thirst us out."

"And there are only two men mean enough to see a horse die that way," said Hare slowly.

"Holderness and Dene."

Other Zebra Books by Zane Grey

BETTY ZANE

BUFFALO BILL: HERO OF THE
WILD WEST

THE SPIRIT OF THE BORDER
THE HERITAGE OF THE DESERT
THE LAST TRAIL

**THE HERITAGE
OF THE DESERT**

ZANE GREY



**ZEBRA BOOKS
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I

THE SIGN OF THE DESERT

"But the man's almost dead."

The speech pierced John Hare's drift of dreams, and its import, grim in sullen expostulation, stung to life his fainting spirit. He opened his eyes. The desert stretched there, the appalling thing that had overpowered him with its deceiving purple distance. Near him stood sombre-clad figures, two apart from the others, a gray-bearded giant watching with grave eyes the one who had spoken. Stern silence brooded between them, a silence of conviction, for in the little man's words, in his outspread palms, in the flame of his eyes, spoke the truth.

"Leave him here where we found him," presently continued the speaker. "He's the fellow run out of Lund; the fellow sent from Salt Lake City to spy out those in league with the cattle thieves. He's all but dead. Dene, with his outlaws, is close on his trail. Dare you risk crossing Dene? Can you afford to succor a man doomed by this Montana rustler, this devil who has spilled our blood and turned our peaceful desert into a shambles? Can you read no better the sign of the times?"

The stately answer might have come from a Scottish Convenanter or a follower of Cromwell.

"I will not go a hair's breadth out of my way for Dene or any other man."

The answer fell like sonorous strokes from a bell.

"Martin Cole, I read the sign of the times, but it shall not change me. Our fathers crossed the mountains and penetrated the desert, they prospered with the years that brought settlers, cattlemen, sheepherders, all hostile to their religion and livelihood. They left their sons a heritage of faith and deed. What are our toils and perils compared to theirs? Must the menace of a few outlaws warp us from faith and duty? I like not the sign of the times, but it shall not change me. I trust in God. I am a Mormon. Not yet are my hands stained with blood."

"August Naab, I am a Mormon too," returned Cole, "but my hands are stained with blood. Soon yours will be if you keep your water-holes and your cattle. Yes, I know. You're strong, stronger than any of us, far off in your desert oasis, hemmed in by walls, cut off by cañon and river, guarded by your Navajo friends. But Holderness is creeping slowly on you; he'll usurp your water rights, and drive your stock, as he has done to us. And soon Dene will steal cattle under your very eyes. You should avert as long as possible their enmity."

"I cannot pass by this helpless man," declared August Naab.

"There!" With face livid and shaking hand, Cole pointed westward: "There! Dene and his band! See, under the red wall; see the dust, not ten miles away. See them."

The desert, gray in the foreground, purple in the distance, sloped to the west. Eyes keen as those of hawks searched the waste, and followed the long, red, mountain rampart, which, sheer in bold height and processional in its craggy sweep, shut out the north. Far away, little puffs of dust rose above the white sage, and creeping specks moved at snail pace.

"See them? Ah! Then look, August Naab — look in

the heavens above for my prophecy," cried Cole fanatically. "The red sunset — the sign of the times — blood!"

A broad bar of dense black shut out the April sky, except in the extreme west, where a clear pale blue formed background for several clouds of striking color and shape. They alone in all that expanse were dyed in the desert's sunset crimson. The largest projected from behind the dark cloud bank like a huge fist, and the others, small and round, floated below. So there hung in the sky an extraordinary representation of a godlike hand, immense and awful, clutching with inexorable strength a blood-red, dripping heart.

The companions of the two men, inspired by Martin Cole, watched the phenomenon with awe.

Then, as light surrenders to shade, the sinister color faded, vanished; the tracing of the closed hand softened and smoothed; flush and glow paled, leaving the sky purple, as if mirroring the desert floor; one golden shaft shot up, to be blotted out by sudden, darkening change, and the sun had set.

"That may be God's will," said August Naab. "So be it. Martin Cole, you have forgotten the Scriptures. Take your men and horses, and go."

One violent exclamation succeeded to rattle of stirrups and creak of saddles and clink of spurs; then followed the driving rush of fiery horses; Cole and his men disappeared in a pall of yellow dust.

A wan, but grateful, smile lightened John Hare's face, as he spoke weakly: "I fear your — generous act — can't save me — may mean you harm. I'd rather you left me — seeing you have women in your party."

"Don't try to talk yet," said August Naab. "You're faint. Here — drink." He stooped to Hare, who was

leaning against a sagebush, and held a flask to his lips. Rising, he called to his men: "Make camp, sons. We have an hour before the outlaws come up, and if they don't go round the sand dune we'll have longer."

Hare's flagging senses soon rallied, and he forgot himself in wonder. While the bustle went on, unhitching of wagon teams, hobbling and feeding of horses, unpacking of camp supplies, Naab appeared to be in deep meditation or prayer. Not once did he glance backward over the trail on which peril was fast approaching. His gaze fastened on a ridge to the east, where desert line, fringed by stunted cedars, met the pale-blue sky. He kept that steady gaze for a long time. At length, he turned to the camp fire, raked out red coals, placed the iron pots, and otherwise assisted the women who were preparing the meal.

A cool wind blew in from the desert, rustling the sage, sifting the sand, fanning the red coals to burning opals. Twilight failed, and night fell. Intense blue waved like a flash over the heavens, and, one by one, magically, great stars shone out, cold and bright. From the cloak of blackness circling the camp burst the short bark, the staccato yelp, the hungry whine, the long, drawn-out mourn of desert wolves.

"Supper, sons," called Naab, as he replenished the fire with an armful of greasewood.

Naab's sons had his stature, though not his bulk. They were lean wiry, rangy men, young, yet somehow old. The desert had multiplied their years. Hare could not have told one face from another, the bronze skin and steel eye and hard line of each was so alike. The women, one middle-aged, the others young, were of comely aspect.

"Mescal," called the Mormon.

A slender girl slipped from one of the covered

wagons; she was dark, supple, straight as an Indian.

August Naab dropped to his knees, and as the members of his family bowed their heads, he extended his hands over them and over the food laid on the ground.

"Lord, we kneel in humble thanksgiving. Bless this food to our use. Strengthen us, guide us, keep us as Thou hast in the past. Bless this stranger within our gate. Help us to help him. Teach us Thy ways, O Lord — Amen."

Hare found himself flushing and thrilling, found himself unable to control a painful binding in his throat, and he coughed to disguise a sob. In forty-eight hours, he had learned to hate Mormons with unutterable hatred; here before this austere man, he felt that hatred wrenched from his heart, and in its place stirred something warm and living. He was glad — for if he had to die, as he believed, either from the deed of evil men, or from this last struggle of his wasted body, he did not want to die in bitterness.

How strange he felt since that simple prayer! Memory recalled the time when he used to tease his sister and anger his father and hurt his mother at the breakfast table during prayer. They were gone, and he traced in single thought the few events that had brought him to this sad pass. Whatever the outcome, he must be brave, and he sought for help in the face of his new friend. What wonderful leonine force was there! Then all merged in an unreal thronging — the feeling of himself there in the sand, the meaning of the silent figures in the ruddy firelight, the moaning of the wind and mourning of the wolves, impending peril and overwhelming sense of black night, of desert, of mystery.

"Mescal, wait on the stranger," said August Naab. She knelt beside him, tendering him meat and

drink. His nerveless fingers refused to hold the cup, and she put it to his lips while he drank. Hot coffee revived him; he ate, and grew stronger, and readily began to talk when the Mormon asked for his story.

"My story is not much. My name is Hare. I am twenty-four. My parents are dead. I came West because the doctors said I could not live in the East. At first, I got better. But my money gave out, and work became a necessity. I tramped from place to place, ending up ill in Salt Lake City. People were kind to me there. Some one got me a job with a big cattle company, and sent me to Marysvale, from there over the bleak plains south. It was cold; I was ill when I reached Lund.

"Before I even knew what my duties were — for at Lund I was to begin work — men called me a spy. One fellow, 'Two-Spot Chance' — I'll not forget him — kicked me and choked me till I was senseless. When I came to, the innkeeper led me out the back way, gave me bread and water, and said: 'Take this road to Bane; it's sixteen miles. If you make it, some one will give you a lift north.' I walked all night and the next day, and then I wandered on till I dropped here, where you found me."

"You missed the road to Bane; this is the trail to White Sage. It's a trail of sand and stone, that leaves no tracks, a lucky thing for you. Dene was not in Lund while you were there — else you would not be here. He has not seen you, he cannot be certain of your trail. Maybe he rode to Bane, but still we may find a way — "

One of his sons whistled low, causing him to rise slowly, to peer into the darkness, to listen intently.

"Here, get up," he said, extending a hand to Hare. "Pretty shaky, eh? Can you walk? Give me a hold —

there. Mescal, come." The slender girl came noiselessly, like a shadow. "Take his arm." Between them, they led Hare to a jumble of stones on the outer edge of the circle of light.

"It would never do to hide," continued Naab, lowering his voice to a swift whisper. "That might be fatal. You are in sight from the camp fire, but indistinct. By and by the outlaws will get here, and if any of them prowl around close, you and Mescal pretend to be sweethearts. Understand? They'll pass by Mormon love-making without a second look. Now, lad, courage. Mescal, it may save his life."

Naab returned to the fire, his shadow looming in gigantic proportions on the white canopy of a covered wagon. Fitful gusts of wind fretted the blaze; it roared and crackled and sputtered, now illuminating the still forms, anon enveloping them in fantastic obscurity.

Hare shivered, perhaps from the cold air, perhaps from growing dread. Westward fell the desert, an impenetrable black void: in front, the gloomy wall lifted jagged peaks close to the stars; to the right sloped up the ridge, the rugged rocks and stunted cedars of its summit standing in weird relief.

Suddenly, Hare's fugitive glance descried a dark object, and became fixed as this moved and rose from behind the summit of the ridge, to make a bold, black figure silhouetted against the cold clearness of sky. He saw it distinctly, realized it was close, and breathed hard, as the sharp-cut outline, the wind-swept mane and tail, the lean, wild shape and single plume formed an Indian mustang and rider.

"Look!" he whispered to the girl. "A mounted Indian — there on the ridge. There! He's gone — no, I see him again. But that's another. Look! There are more — another and another."

He ceased, in breathless suspense, and stared fearfully at a line of mounted Indians, moving in single file over the ridge, to become lost to view in the intervening blackness. A faint rattling of gravel and a peculiar crack of unshod hoof on stone gave reality to that shadowy train.

"Navajos," said Mescal.

"Navajos!" he echoed. "I heard of them at Lund — 'desert hawks,' the men said, worse than Piutes. Are they stealing down upon us? Must we not alarm the men? You — aren't you afraid?"

"No."

"But they are hostile."

"Not to him." She pointed at the stalwart figure, standing against the firelight.

"Ah! I remember. The man Cole, who wanted to leave me here, he spoke of friendly Navajos. They must be close by. What does it mean?"

"I am not sure. I think they are out there in the cedars, waiting."

"Waiting! For what?"

"Perhaps for a signal."

"Then they were expected?"

"I do not know; I only guess. We used to go often to White Sage and Lund; now we go seldom, and, when we go, there seem to be Navajos hovering near camp at night, and riding the ridges by day. I believe Father Naab knows."

"Your father is risking much for me. He is good — I am — I wish I could show my gratitude."

"I call him Father Naab, but he is not my father."

"Not your father? A niece or grand-daughter, then."

"I am no relation. Father Naab raised me in his family. My mother was a Navajo, my father a Spaniard."

"Why," exclaimed Hare, "when you came out of the wagon, I took you for an Indian girl! But the

moment you spoke — you talk so well — no one would dream — ”

“Mormons teach the children they raise,” she said, as he paused, in embarrassment.

He wanted to ask if she were a Mormon, but the question seemed curious and unnecessary. He awakened to interest with the suggestion of her parentage. He divined suddenly that he had found pleasure in her low voice — it was new and strange, low and even, unlike any woman’s voice he had ever heard; and he regarded her closely.

He had only time for a glance at the straight, dark profile, at dark hair, when she turned startled eyes on him, eyes black as the night, brilliant as the stars. And they were eyes that looked through and beyond him, did not see him. She held up a hand, slowly bent toward the wind, and whispered:

“Listen!”

Hare heard nothing save the barking of coyotes and the breeze in the sage. He saw, however, the men rise from round the camp fire to face the north, and the women climb into the wagon, and close the canvas flaps. And he prepared himself, with what fortitude he could command, to hear the approach of the outlaws. He waited, straining to catch a sound. His heart throbbed audibly, like a muffled drum, but for an endless moment his ears seemed deadened to aught else. Then a stronger puff of wind whipped in, pregnant with rapid, rhythmic beat of flying hoofs.

Suspense ended, Hare experienced the easing of a weight upon him. Whatever was to be his fate, it would be soon decided. The wind now brought a clattering roar. A black mass hurled itself over the border of opaque circle, plunged into the light, pounded, and halted.

August Naab deliberately threw a bundle of grease-

wood upon the camp fire. A blaze leaped up, sending abroad a red flare.

"Who comes?" he called.

"Friends, good Mormons, friends," was the answer.

"Get down — friends, and come to the fire."

Three horsemen advanced to the foreground; others, a troop of eight or ten, remained in the shadow, a silent group manifestly not courting the cheerful light. All was dark about them, except trappings of bridles and saddles and glint of weapons.

Hare sank back against the stone, gradually weakening. He knew the foremost of those horsemen, though he had never seen him.

"Dene," whispered Mescal, and confirmed his instinctive fear.

Yet he was alive to the handsome presence of the outlaw. Glimpses he had caught of Nebraska "bad" men returned vividly, as he noted the clean-shaven face, the youthful, supple body, the cool, careless mien.

Dene's eyes glittered as he pulled off his gauntlets, and beat the sand out of them; and but for that glittering, his leisurely, friendly manner would have disarmed menace.

"Are y'u the Mormon, Naab?" he queried.

"August Naab, I am."

"Dry camp, eh? Hosses tired, I reckon. Shore it's a sandy trail. Where's the rest of y'u fellars?"

"Cole and his men were in a hurry to make White Sage to-night. They were traveling light; I have heavy wagons."

"Naab. I reckon y'u shore wouldn't tell a lie."

"I have never lied."

"Heerd of a young fellar thet was in Lund? Pale chap — 'lunger,' we'd call him back West."

"I heard he had been mistaken for a spy at Lund, and had fled toward Bane."

"Haven't seen nothin' of him this side of Lund?"

"No."

"Seen any Navvies?"

"Yes."

The outlaw scanned Naab with speculative attention. Apparently, he was about to speak of the Navajos, for his quick uplift of head at Naab's blunt affirmative suggested that; but he did not. Slowly, he drew on his gloves.

"Naab, I'm shore comin' to visit y'u some day. Never been over thet range. Heerd y'u hed fine water, fine cattle. An', say, I seen thet little Navajo girl y'u have, an' I wouldn't mind seein' her again."

August Naab kicked the fire into brighter blaze. "Yes, fine range," he presently replied, level gaze on Dene. "Fine water, fine cattle, fine browse. I've a fine graveyard, too; thirty graves, and not one a woman's. Fine place for graves, the cañon country. You don't have to dig. There's one grave the Indians never named — it's three thousand feet deep."

"Thet must be in hell," replied Dene, with a smile, ignoring the covert meaning. He leisurely surveyed Naab's four sons, the wagons and horses, till his eye fell upon Hare and Mescal. With that, he swung in his saddle, as if to dismount.

"Shore want a look around."

"Get down, get down," returned the Mormon. The deep voice, cold, un-welcoming, vibrant with an odd ring, would have struck a more doubtful man than Dene. It was as if Dene was assured he could get down, but there was no promise that he would get up again. The outlaw swung his leg back over the pommel, sagged in the saddle, and appeared pondering the question. Plain it was he was uncertain of his ground. At no time had he shown decision, but now his indecision was brief.

"Two-Spot, y'u look 'em over," he ordered.

The third horseman dismounted, and went toward the wagons.

Hare, watching this scene, fascinated, became conscious that his fear had intensified with the recognition of the outlaw, Two-Spot. It was now an inward burning. In his excitement, he moved against Mescal, and felt her shaking violently.

"Are you afraid?" he whispered.

"Yes, of Dene."

The outlaw rummaged in one of the wagons, pulled aside the canvas flaps of the other, guffawed loudly, and then, with clinking spurs, he tramped through the camp, kicking the beds, overturning a pile of saddles, and making disorder generally, till he spied the couple sitting on the stone in the shadow.

When the outlaw lurched that way, Hare, with a start of recollection, took Mescal in his arms, and leaned his head down against hers. He felt one of her hands lightly brush his shoulder, and rest there, trembling. All his faculties then seemed to wait, and he was numb.

Shuffling footsteps scraped the sand, sounded nearer and nearer, slowed and paused.

"Sparkin'! Dead to the world. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

The coarse laugh gave place to moving footsteps brushing the sage farther and farther away. The rattling clink of stirrup and spur mingled with the restless stamp of horse. Chance had mounted.

Dene's voice drawled out: "Goodby, Naab, I shore will see y'u all some day."

Clamp and stamp, heavy thuds of many hoofs evened into a roar that diminished as it rushed away.

In unutterable relief, Hare realized his deliverance. He tried to move, but power of movement had gone from him. He was sinking, yet the sensations of the

instant were singularly acute. Mescal's hand dropped from his shoulder; her cheek, that had been cold against his, grew hot; she quivered through all her slender length. Then confusion claimed his sense. Gratitude and hope flooded his soul. Something sweet and beautiful, the touch of this desert girl, rioted in blood, that beat, mounted, swelled in pain and suffocation. He was whirling in darkness — sinking — falling; and he knew no more.

II

WHITE SAGE

August Naab opened the garden gate of a cottage in White Sage, and admitted Martin Cole. They met as friends; no trace of scorn marred August's greeting, and Martin was not the same man who had shown fear out on the desert. His welcome was one of respectful regard for his superior.

"Elder, I heard you were safe in," he said fervently. "We feared — I know not what. I was distressed till I got the news of your arrival. How's the young man?"

"He was out of his head last night, and had a fever. I hope to find him better soon."

"I didn't expect him to live."

"He is very ill. But while there's life there's hope. His right lung is bad, and he's starved."

"Will the bishop administer to him?"

"Gladly, if the young man is willing. Come, let us go in."

"Wait, August. Did you know your son Snap was in the village?"

"My son here?" August Naab betrayed anxiety. "I left him home with work. He should not have left. Is — is he — "

"He's drinking, and in an ugly mood. It seems he traded horses with Jeff Larsen, and got the worst of the deal. There's pretty sure to be a fight."

"He always hated Larsen."

"Small wonder. Larsen is mean; he's as bad as

we've got, and that's saying a good deal. Snap has done worse things than fight with Larsen. He's doing a worse thing now, August — he's too friendly with Dene."

"I've heard — I've heard it before. Martin, what can I do?"

"Do? God knows. What can any of us do? Times have changed, August. Dene is here in White Sage, free, welcome in many homes. Some of our neighbors, perhaps men we trust, are secret members of this rustler's band."

"You're right, Cole. They're Mormons who are cattle thieves. To my eternal shame, I confess it. Under cover of night, they ride with Dene, and here in our midst they meet him in easy tolerance, saying it's as well to have his good will. Driven from Montana and Nebraska plains, he comes here to corrupt our young men. God's mercy!"

"August, some of our young men need no one to corrupt them. Dene had no great task to win some of them to his infamous will. He rode in here with a few outlaws, and now he has a strong band. We've got to face it. We haven't any law, but he can be killed. Some one must kill him. Yet, August, bad as Dene is, he doesn't menace our livelihood as Holderness does. Dene steals a few cattle, kills a man here and there. Holderness reaches out a powerful hand, and takes our springs. Because we've no law to stop him, he steals the blood of our life — water! Water! God's gift to the desert! Some one must kill Holderness, too!"

"Martin, this lust to kill is a fearful thing. Come in; you must pray with the bishop."

"No, it's not prayer I need, elder," replied Cole stubbornly. "I'm still a good Mormon. What I want is the stock I've lost, and my fields green again."

August Naab had no answer for his friend. They passed up a shady path to a vine-covered cottage. On a porch sat a very old man, with snow-white hair and beard.

"Bishop, Brother Martin is railing again," said Naab, as Cole bared his head to the old man.

"Martin, my son, unbosom thyself," rejoined the bishop.

"Black doubt it is, and no light," said Cole despondently. "I'm of the younger generation of Mormons, and faith is harder for me. I see signs you can't see. I've had trials hard to bear. I was rich in cattle, sheep, and water. These Gentiles, this rancher Holderness, and this outlaw Dene, have driven my cattle, parched my sheep, fenced and piped my water off my fields. So I like not the present. We're no longer as in the old days. Our young men are drifting away, and the few who return come with ideas inimical to Mormonism. Our girls and boys are growing up influenced by the Gentiles among us. They intermarry, and that's a death blow to our creed."

"Martin, cast out this poison from your heart. Return to faith. The millennium will come. Christ will be on earth again. The ten tribes of Israel will be restored. The Book of Mormon is the Word of God. The creed will live. We may suffer here and die, but our spirits will go marching on; and the City of Zion will be builded over our graves."

Cole held up his hands in a meekness that signified hope, if not faith, and followed the bishop into the house. In the well-lighted room, so low-ceiled the Naab could scarcely stand erect, Hare sat, propped up by pillows, on a couch. Though haggard from past distress, he appeared to be resting easily.

" 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves —' " The bishop's

voice bore the quaver of age, and it was mellow with kindness. The implication was not lost upon Hare, who responded to it with a grateful smile.

August Naab bent over him.

"I would like to have the bishop administer to you."

"What is that?" asked Hare.

"A Mormon custom — 'the laying on of hands.' We know its efficiency in trouble and illness. A bishop of the Mormon church has the gift of tongues, of prophecy, of revelation, of healing. Let him administer to you. It entails no obligation. Accept it as a prayer."

"I am willing," replied the young man.

Thereupon, Naab spoke a few low words to some one through the open door. Voices ceased: soft footsteps sounded without; women crossed the threshold, followed by tall young men and rosy-cheeked girls and round-eyed children. The room filled quickly. A white-haired old woman came forward with solemn dignity. She carried a silver bowl, which she held for the bishop as he stood close by Hare's couch.

The bishop put his hands into the bowl, anointing them with fragrant oil; then he placed them on the young man's head, and offered up a brief prayer, beautiful in its simplicity and tremulous utterance.

To Hare it seemed the solemnity broke to a contrast that was almost merriment, so quickly did the Mormons move to him with pleasant words on their lips, pleasant smiles on their faces. The children filed by his couch; bashful, yet sympathetic; the women murmured, the young men grasped his hand. Mescal flitted by, with downcast eye, with shy smile, but no word.

"Your fever is gone," said August Naab, with his hand on Hare's cheek.

"It comes and goes swiftly," replied Hare. "I feel better now, only I'm oppressed. I can't breathe freely. I want air, and I'm hungry."

Naab unhooked a window, and swung it inward. "Mother Mary, the lad's hungry. Judith, Esther, where are your wits? Help your mother. Mescal, wait on him, see to his comfort."

"May I not go outside? I'm stifled," said Hare.

"Come to the porch," replied Naab, as Hare dizzily arose, and he led him out to the bishop's armchair. He breathed in quick pants, and a moisture dampened his brow.

Mescal brought a little table and a pillow, and the other girls soon followed with food and drink; then they hovered about him, earnestly solicitous and tragic-eyed.

"The bishop said I fell among thieves," mused Hare, when he was once more alone. "I've fallen among saints, as well." He thought sadly that he could never repay this August Naab. "If only I might live —" How restful was this cottage garden! The greensward, dark and dewy, was a soothing balm to his eyes.

Flowers new to him, though of familiar spring-time hue, lifted fresh faces everywhere; fruit trees, with branches intermingling, blended the white and pink of blossoms. Laughter of children somewhere in the garden sounded softly. Birds unknown to him darted among the trees like brown streaks, and their notes were new, but their song was the old, delicious monotone — the joy of living and love of spring. A green-bowered irrigation ditch led by the porch, and unseen water flowed gently, with gurgle and tinkle, with music in its hurry. The hum of innumerable bees murmured amid the blossoms.

Hare fell asleep. Upon returning drowsily to consciousness, he caught, through half-open eyes, the gleam of level shafts of gold sunlight low down in the trees; and then he felt himself being carried into the house, to be laid upon the couch. Some one gently unbuttoned his shirt at the neck, removed his shoes, and covered him with a blanket. Before he had fully awakened, he was left alone, and deep quiet settled over the house. A languorous sense of ease and rest lulled him to sleep again.

In another moment, it seemed to him, he was awake; bright daylight streamed through the window, and a cool morning breeze stirred the faded curtain.

The drag in his breathing that was always a fore-runner of a coughing spell warned him now; he put on coat and shoes, and went outside, where his cough attacked him, had its sway, and left him.

"Good morning to you," presently sang out August Naab's cheery voice. "Sixteen hours of sleep, my lad!"

"I did sleep, didn't I? No wonder I feel well this morning. But then I didn't have one of my weakening night sweats. A peculiarity of my illness is that one day I'm down, the next day up."

"With the goodness of God, my lad, we shall gradually increase the days up. Go in to breakfast. Afterward, I want to talk to you. This'll be a busy day for me, shoeing the horses and packing supplies. I want to start for home to-morrow."

Hare pondered, while he ate, over Naab's words; the suggestion in them, implying a relation to his future, made him wonder if the good Mormon intended to take him to his desert home. He believed so, and warmed anew to this friend. But he had not enthusiasm for himself; his future presented a drab prospect.

Naab was waiting for him on the porch, and drew him away from the cottage down the path toward the gate.

"I want you to go home with me."

"You're kind — I'm only a sort of beggar — I've no strength left to work my way. I'll go — though it's only to die."

"I haven't the gift of revelation — yet somehow I see what you won't die of this illness. I believe — but come home with me. It's a beautiful place, my Navajo oasis. The Indians call it the Garden of Esch-tah. If you can get well anywhere, it will be there."

"I'll go — but I ought not. What can I do for you? Nothing."

"No man can ever tell what he may do for another. The time may come — well, John, is it settled?" He offered his huge, broad hand.

"It's settled — I —" Hare faltered as he put his hand in Naab's. The Mormon's grip straightened his frame, and braced him. Strength and simplicity flowed from the giant's toil-hardened palm. Hare swallowed his thanks along with his emotion that raised a lump in his throat, and for what he had intended to say he substituted: "No one ever called me John, I don't know the name. Call me Jack."

"Very well, Jack, and now, let's see. You'll need some things from the store. Can you come with me? It's not far."

"Surely. What I need most is a razor, to scrape the alkali and stubble off my face."

The wide street, bordered by cottages, peeping from green and white orchards, extended in a straight line to the base of the ascent that led up to the Pink Cliffs. The side streets were similar, except that they opened out into the level, bare desert. A green square inclosed a gray church, a schoolhouse, and

public hall. Farther down the main thoroughfare were several weather-boarded, whitewashed stores.

Two dusty men were riding along, one on each side of the wildest, most vicious little horse Hare had ever seen. It reared and bucked and kicked, trying to escape from two lassoes. In front of the largest store were a number of mustangs, all standing free, with bridles thrown over their heads on the ground. The loungers leaning against the railing and about the doors were lank, brown men, very like Naab's sons. Some wore sheepskin chaps, some blue overalls; all wore boots and spurs, wide soft hats, and in their belts, far to the back, hung large Colt revolvers.

"We'll buy what you need, just as if you expected to ride the ranges for me to-morrow," said Naab. "The first thing we ask a new man is, can he ride? Next, can he shoot?"

"I could ride before I got so weak. I've never handled a revolver, but I can shoot a rifle. Never shot at anything except targets, and it seemed to come natural for me to hit them."

"Good. We'll show you some targets — lions, bears, deer, cats, wolves. There's a fine forty-four Winchester here, that my friend Abe has been trying to sell. It has a long barrel, and weighs eight pounds. Our desert riders like the light carbines that go easy on a saddle. Most of the mustangs are not weight carriers. This rifle has a great range; I've shot it, and it's just the gun for you to use on wolves and coyotes that steal the sheep. You'll need a Colt and a saddle, too."

"By the way," he went on, as they mounted the store steps, "here's the kind of money we use in this country." He handed Hare a slip of blue paper, a written check for a sum of money, signed, but without register of bank or name of firm. "We

don't use real money. There's very little coin or currency in Southern Utah. Most of the Gentiles who have lately come in have money, and some of us Mormons have a bag or two of gold, but scarcely any of it gets into circulation. We use these checks, which go from man to man, sometimes for six months. The round-up of a check means sheep, cattle, horses, grain, merchandise, or labor. Every man gets his real money's value without paying out an actual cent."

"Such a system speaks eloquently of honest men," said Hare, laughing his surprise.

They went in a wide door to tread a maze of narrow aisles between boxes and barrels, stacks of canned vegetables, and piles of harness and dry goods, and entered an open space where several men leaned on a counter.

"Hello, Abe," said Naab. "Seen anything of Snap?"

"Hello, August, Yes, Snap's inside. So's Holderness. Says he rode in off the range on purpose to see you." Abe designated an open doorway, from which issued loud voices. Hare glanced into a narrow room, full of smoke and the fumes of rum. Through the blue haze, he dimly descried a crowd of men at a rude bar. Abe went to the door, and called out: "Hey, Snap, your dad wants you. Holderness, here's August Naab."

With that, a man staggered up the few steps leading to the store, and swayed in. His long face had a hawkish cast, and it was gray, not with age, rather with the sage gray of the desert. His eyes were of the same hue, cold, yet burning with little, fiery flecks. He appeared short of stature because of a curvature of spine; but, straightened up, he would have been tall. He wore a blue flannel shirt, blue overalls; round his lean hips a belt, holding two Colt revolvers, heavy dark butts projecting outward; and he had on high boots, with long, cruel spurs.

"Howdy, father," he said.

"I'm packing to-day," returned August Naab. "We ride out to-morrow. I need your help."

"All-right. When I get my pinto from Larsen."

"Never mind Larsen. If you traded with him, and he got the better of you, let the matter drop."

"Jeff got my pinto for a mustang with three legs. If I hadn't been drunk, I'd never have traded. So I'm looking for Jeff."

He bit out the last words, with a peculiar snap of long teeth, a circumstance which caused Hare instantly to associate the savage clicking with the name he had heard given this man. August Naab had a black brow and gloomy eyes and stern, shut mouth, an expression of righteous anger, helplessness, and grief combined, the look of a man to whom obstacles had been nothing, at last confronted with crowning defeat. Hare realized at once that this son was Naab's first-born, best-loved, a thorn in his side, a black sheep.

"Say, father, is this the spy you found on the trail?" Snap's pale eyes gleamed on Hare, and the little flames seemed to darken and leap.

"John Hare, the young man I found, but he's not a spy."

"You can't make any one believe that now. He's down as a spy. Dene's spy! His name's gone over the ranges as a counter of unbranded stock. Dene has named him, and Dene has marked him. It's not done you any good to pick him up. Don't take him home, as you've taken so many sick and hunted men before. What's the good of it? You never made a Mormon of one of them yet. Don't take him — unless you want another grave for your cemetery. Ha! Ha!"

Hare recoiled with a shock. So evil a face he had never seen; so deadly a meaning had never before

been a matter of his experience. Snap Naab swayed to the door, stepped down, all the time with his face over his shoulder, baleful glance on Hare; then the blue haze swallowed him, releasing Hare from a forbidding dread.

The several loungers went out; August engaged the storekeeper in conversation, introducing Hare and explaining their wants; and they inspected the various needs of a range rider, selecting in the end, not the few suggested by Hare, but the many chosen by Naab. The last purchase was the rifle Naab had talked about. It was a beautiful weapon, shining blue, finely polished and carved, entirely out of place among the blunt, plain, coarse-sighted, and coarse-stocked guns in the rack.

"Never had a chance to sell it," said Abe. "Too long and heavy and fancy for the riders. I'll let it go cheap, half price, and the cartridges, also, two thousand."

"Taken," replied Naab quickly, with a satisfaction that showed he liked a bargain.

"August, you must be going to shoot some?" queried Abe. "Something bigger than rabbits and coyotes. It's about time — even if you are an elder. We Mormons must — " he broke off, continuing in a low tone: "Here's Holderness, now."

Hare wheeled, with the interest that had gathered with the reiteration of this man's name. A newcomer stooped to get in the door. He out-topped even Naab in height, and was a superb, blond-bearded man, striding with the spring of a mountaineer in his step.

"Good day to you, Naab," he said. "Is this the young fellow you picked up?"

"Yes; Jack Hare," rejoined Naab.

"Well, Hare, I'm Holderness. You'll recall my name. You were sent to Lund by men interested in my

ranges. I expected to see you in Lund, but couldn't get over."

Hare met the proffered hand with his own, and as he had recoiled from Snap Naab, so now he received another shock, different, impelling in its power, instinctive of some great portent in this meeting, but inexplicable. Holderness had a pleasant, winning charm, yet Hare was more impressed by an indefinable subtlety, a nameless distrust, as colorless as the clear, penetrating amber lightness of this rancher's eyes.

"Holderness, will you correct the impression that has gone out concerning Hare?" inquired Naab.

"You mean about his being a spy? Well, Naab, the truth is, that's the very nature of the work he undertook. I advised against sending a man down here for that sort of work. It won't do. These Mormons will steal each other's cattle, and they've got to get rid of them. So they won't have a man taking account of stock, brands, and all that. If the Mormons would stand for it, the rustlers wouldn't. This country's too new for that; it will come in time, but not yet a while. I'll take Hare out to the ranch, and give him work, if he wants. But he'd do best to leave Utah."

"Thank you, no," replied Hare decidedly.

"He's going with me," said August Naab.

Holderness accepted this, with an almost imperceptible nod, and he swept Hare with eyes that searched and probed for latent possibilities. It was the keen intelligence of a man who knew what development meant on the desert; not in any sense an interest in the young man at present. Then he turned his back.

Hare, taking this as an indication that Holderness wished to talk to Naab, walked to the counter, and began assorting his purchases, but he could not help hearing what was said.

"Lungs bad?" queried Holderness.

"One of them" replied Naab.

"He's all in. Better send him out of the country. He's got the name of 'Dene's spy,' and he'll never get another on this desert. Dene will kill him. Moreover, it's not good judgment on your part, Naab, to take him with you. You're displeasing even friends and Mormons. It means trouble for you."

"We've settled it," said Naab coldly.

"Well, remember I've warned you. I've tried to be friendly with you, Naab, but you won't have it. Any way, I've wanted to see you lately, to find out how we stand."

"What do you mean?"

"How we stand on several matters. To begin with, there's Mescal."

"You asked me several times for Mescal, and I said no."

"But I never said I'd marry her. I want her, and I'll marry her."

"No," rejoined Naab, adding brevity to his coldness.

"Why not?" demanded Holderness. "Oh, well, I can't take that as an insult. I know there's not enough money in Utah to get a girl away from a Mormon. About the offer for the water rights — how do we stand? I'll give you ten thousand dollars for the rights to Sleeping Springs and Silver Cup."

"Ten thousand!" ejaculated Naab. "Holderness, I wouldn't take a hundred thousand. You might as well ask to buy my home, my stock, my range, twenty years of toil, for ten thousand dollars!"

"You refuse? All right. I think I've made you a fair proposition," said Holderness, in smooth, quick voice. "The land is owned by the government, and though your ranges are across the Arizona line, they really figure as Utah land. My company's spending big

money. The government will see to the interests of the many. No one man can control the water supply of a hundred miles of range. Times are changing. You want to see that. You ought to protect yourself before it is too late."

"Holderness, this is a desert. No men save Mormons could ever have made it habitable. The government scarcely knows of its existence. It will be fifty years before there's any law here. Listen! This desert belongs to Mormons. We penetrated it; we found the springs, dug the ditches. No man can come in here to take our water."

"Why can't he? The water doesn't belong to any one. Why can't he?"

"Because of the unwritten law of the desert. No Mormon would refuse you or your horse a drink, or even a reasonable supply for your stock. But you can't come in here and take our water for your own use, to supplant us, to parch our stock. Why, even an Indian respects desert law!"

"Bah! I'm not a Mormon or an Indian. I'm a cattle-man. It's plain business with me. Once more I make you the offer."

Naab deigned him no reply. The men faced each other for a silent moment, glances scintillating. Holderness seeing the Mormon as flint, a changeless, iron man, dangerous to cross; Naab beholding the unmasked greed, the unscrupulous motive, the self-announced hostility of an enemy. Then Holderness whirled on his heel, jostling into Hare, who stepped too late to avoid the collision.

"Get out of my way," said the rancher, in the disgust of intense irritation. He swung his arm, and, with a slap of his open hand, sent Hare against the counter.

"Jack," said Naab, breathing hard, "Holderness showed his real self to-day. I always knew it, yet I

gave him the benefit of the doubt. For him to strike you! I've not the gift of revelation, but I see — let us go."

On the return to the bishop's cottage, Naab did not speak once; the transformation that had begun with the appearance of his drunken son had reached a climax of gloomy silence after the clash with Holderness. Naab went directly to the bishop, and presently the quavering voice of the old minister rose in prayer.

Hare settled himself comfortably in the chair on the porch; and, being somewhat weary from the excitement and exertion of the morning, fell into a doze, from which he awakened with a start. Naab's sons, with Martin Cole, and several other men Hare had not seen before, were standing in the yard. Naab himself was gently crowding women into the house, and when he got them all inside, he closed the door, and addressed Cole.

"Was it a fair fight?"

"Yes, an even break. They met in front of Abe's. I saw the meeting. Neither was surprised. They stood for a moment, watching each other, Larsen with his hand twitching by his side, Snap with his hand up before his face. Then they drew — only Snap was quicker. Larsen's gun went off as he fell. That trick you taught Snap with a gun saved his life again. Larsen was no slouch on the draw."

"Where's Snap now?"

"Gone after his pinto. He was sober. Said he'd pack at once. Larsen's friends are ugly. Snap said to tell you to hurry out of the village with young Hare, if you want to take him at all. Dene has ridden in; he swears you won't take Hare away."

"We're all packed, ready to hitch up," returned Naab. "We could start at once, only until dark I'd rather take chances here than out on the trail."

"Snap said Dene would ride right into the bishop's after Hare."

"No. He wouldn't dare."

"Father!" Dave Naab spoke sharply from where he stood, high on a grassy bank. "Here's Dene, now, riding up, with Culver, and some man I don't know. They're coming in. Dene's jumped the fence! Look out!"

A clatter of hoofs and pattering of gravel preceded the appearance of a black horse in the garden path. His rider bent low, to dodge the vines of the arbor, and reined in before the porch, to slip down out of the saddle with the agility of an Indian. It was Dene, dark, smiling, nonchalant.

"What do you seek in the home of a bishop?" challenged August Naab, planting his broad bulk square before Hare.

"Dene's spy!"

"What do you seek in the home of a bishop?" repeated Naab.

"I shore want to see the young feller y'u lied to me about," returned Dene, with his smile slowly fading.

"No speech could be a lie to an outlaw."

"I want him, y'u Mormon preacher!"

"You can't have him."

"I'll shore get him."

In one great stride, Naab straddled the path, and towered over Dene.

The rustler's gaze shifted warily from Naab to the quiet Mormons, and back again. Then his right hand quivered, and shot downward. Naab's action corresponded in swiftness. A Colt gleamed and whirled to the grass, and the outlaw cried out as his arm cracked in the Mormon's grasp.

Dave Naab leaped off the bank directly in front of Dene's approaching companions, and confronted them, silent, with his hand on his hip.

August Naab swung the outlaw against the porch post, and held him there with brawny arm.

"Whelp of an evil breed!" he thundered, shaking his gray head. "Do you think we fear you and your gun-sharp tricks? Look! See this!" He released Dene and stepped back, with his hand before him. Suddenly, it moved, quicker than sight, and then his Colt lay in his outstretched palm. He dropped it back into the holster. "Let that teach you never to draw on me again." He doubled his huge fist, and shoved it before Dene's eyes. "One blow would crack your skull like an egg shell. Why don't I deal it? Because, you mindless hellhound — because there's a higher law than man's — God's law! Thou shalt not kill! Understand that if you can. Leave me and mine alone from this day. Now, go!"

He pushed Dene down the path, into the arms of his companions.

"Out with you!" said Dave Naab. "Hurry! Get your horse. Hurry! I'm not so particular about God as dad is!"

III

THE TRAIL OF THE RED WALL

After the departure of Dene and his comrades, Naab decided to leave White Sage at nightfall. He sent his sons to the village stores, there to lounge around, as if the untoward events of the day had in no wise determined them to strike out hurriedly for the desert. Martin Cole and the bishop's sons tried to persuade Naab to remain, giving the argument that, as trouble was sure to follow, it could be more safely met in the village. Naab, however, was obdurate, unreasonably so, Cole said, unless there was some good reason why he wished to strike the trail in the night.

When twilight closed in, Naab had his teams hitched and the women shut in the canvas-covered wagons. Hare was to ride in an open wagon, one Naab had left at White Sage to be loaded with grain. When it grew so dark that objects were scarcely discernible, a man vaulted the cottage fence.

"Dave, where are the boys?" asked Naab.

"Not so loud! The boys are coming," replied Dave, in a whisper. "Dene is wild. I guess you snapped a bone in his arm. He swears he'll kill us all. But Chance and the rest of the gang won't be in till late. We've time to reach the Coconina trail, if we hustle."

"Any news of Snap?"

"He rode out before sundown."

Three more forms emerged from the gloom.

"All right, boys. Go ahead, Dave—you lead. Take the pasture lane to the big ditch—we can't cross that—then left on the back road, up the ridge to the trail."

Dave and George Naab mounted their mustangs, and rode through the gate; the first wagon rolled after them, its white dome gradually dissolving in the darkness. The second one started. Then August Naab stepped to his seat on the third, with a low cluck to the team. Hare shut the gate, and climbed over the tailboard of the wagon.

A slight swish of weeds and grasses brushing the wheels was all the sound made in the cautious advance. A bare field lay to the left; to the right, low roofs and sharp chimneys stuck up above the trees; here and there, lights twinkled. No one hailed; not a dog barked; Hare began to breathe easier.

Presently, the leaders turned into a road where the iron hoofs and wheels cracked and crunched the stones.

Hare thought he saw something in the deep shade of a line of poplar trees. He peered closer, and descried a motionless horse and rider, just a shade blacker than the deepest gloom. The next instant, they vanished and the rapid clatter of hoofs down the road told Hare his eyes had not deceived him.

"Getep," growled Naab to his horses. "Jack, did you see that fellow?"

"Yes. What was he doing there?"

"Watching the road. He's one of Dene's scouts."

"Will Dene — "

One of Naab's sons came trotting back. "Think that was Larsen's pal. He was laying in wait for Snap."

"I thought he was a scout for Dene," replied August.

"Maybe he's that, too."

"Likely enough. Hurry along, and keep the gray team going lively. They've had a week's rest."

Hare watched the glimmering lights of the village vanish one by one, like jack-o'-lanterns. The horses kept a steady, even trot on into the huge, windy hall of the desert night. Fleecy clouds veiled the stars, yet transmitted a wan glow.

A chill crept over Hare. As he crawled under the blankets Naab had spread for him, his hand came in contact with a polished metal surface, cold as ice. It was his rifle. Naab, of course, had placed it under the blankets. Somehow, it struck Hare as singular. Fingering the rifle, he found the spring opening on the right side of the breech, and, pressing it down, he felt the round head of a cartridge. Naab had loaded the weapon; he had placed it where Hare's hand must find it, yet he had not spoken of it.

Hare did not stop to reason with his first impulse. Without a word, with silent insistence, disregarding his shattered health, August Naab had given him a man's part. The full meaning lifted him out of his morbid self-abasement. Naab had shown himself not a fighting man. He had conquered just wrath in the meeting with Dene. Yet underneath his Mormon austerity and spiritual purity, lurked a mysterious something, that might have been consciousness of terrible possibility and prowess. His placing of the rifle near Hare's hand spoke for him:

"Here is a weapon; we have women to protect; there are outlaws in pursuit."

Hare soon succumbed to the warmth of the blankets. A drowsiness that he endeavored in vain to throw off smothered his thoughts. Sleep glued his eyelids tight. They opened some time in the night. For a moment, he could not realize where he was. Then the weird opacity of expanse above, the whip of the cold wind across his face, the woolly feel and smell of the blankets, and finally the steady trot of

horses and the clink of a chain swinging somewhere under him, recalled the actuality of the night ride.

When Naab stopped the team, and, climbing down, walked back some rods, to listen, Hare felt sure Dene was coming. He listened, too, but the heave of the horses, the rattle of their harness, were all the sounds he could hear.

Naab returned to his seat; the team started, now no longer in a trot; they were climbing. What seemed a long while elapsed before Naab again halted to listen. After that, Hare fell into a slumber in which he could hear the slow grating whir of wheels, and, when it ceased, he awoke, to raise himself, and turn his ear to the back trail.

By and by, he discovered that the black night had changed to gray; dawn was not far distant. He dozed and awakened to clear light. A rose-red horizon lay far below and to the eastward. The intervening descent was like a rolling sea, with league-long swells.

"Glad you slept some," greeted Naab. "No sign of Dene yet. If we can get over the divide, we're safe. That's Coconina, there — 'Fire Mountain,' in Navajo meaning. It's a plateau, low and narrow at this end, but it runs far to the east, and rises nine hundred feet. It forms a hundred miles of the north rim of the Grand Cañon. We're across the Arizona line now."

Hare followed the sweep of the green-tipped ridge that curved eastward, getting higher, and growing black and bold against the rosy sky; but, to his inexperienced eyes, its appearance carried no conviction of its noble proportions.

"Don't form any ideas of distance and size yet a while," said Naab, reading Hare's expression. "They'd only have to be reconstructed as soon as you learn what light and air are in this country. It looks only half a mile to the top of the divide; well, if we make

it by midday, we are lucky. There! See a black spot over this way, far under the red wall? Look sharp! Good! That's Holderness' ranch. It's thirty miles from here. Nine Mile Valley heads in there. Once it belonged to Martin Cole. Holderness has it now. And he's begun to range over the divide."

Whenever Naab rested his team, which was often, he sent a searching gaze backward, not near at hand, but at a distance, where the trail wound like a white thread under the red wall.

The sun rose, and warmed the chill air. Hare began to take notice of the increased height and abundance of the sagebrush; and that it was also darker in color. The first cedar tree, stunted in growth, dead at the top, was the halfway mark up the ascent, so Naab said. It was also the forerunner of other cedars, which increased in number toward the summit.

At length, Hare, tired of looking upward at the creeping, white wagons, and fearful of more backward glances, closed his eyes. The wheels crunched on the stones; the horses heaved and labored; Naab's "getep" was the only spoken sound; the sun beamed down warm, then hot; and the hours passed.

Some unusual noise roused Hare out of his lethargy. The wagon was at a standstill. Naab stood on the seat, with outstretched arm. George and Dave were close by their mustangs, and Snap Naab, mounted on a cream-colored pinto, reined him under August's arm, and faced the valley below.

"Maybe you can make them out," said August. "I can't, and I've watched those dust clouds for hours. George can't decide, either."

Hare, looking at Snap, was attracted by the eyes from which his father and brothers expected so much. What little color these desert men had in their eyes! If ever a human being had the eyes of a hawk, Snap

Naab had them. The little brown flecks danced in clear, pale yellow. Evidently, Snap had not located the perplexing dust clouds, for his glance drifted. Suddenly, the remarkable vibration of his pupils, the quickening, coalescing change ceased, and his glance grew fixed, steely, certain.

"That's a bunch of wild mustangs," he said.

Hare gazed till his eyes hurt, but could see neither clouds of dust nor moving objects. No more was said. The sons wheeled their mustangs, and rode to the fore. August Naab reseated himself, and took up the reins. The ascent proceeded. But it proceeded leisurely, with more frequent rests. At the end of an hour, they were descending gradually.

"Here we are at the tanks," said Naab.

Hare saw that they had come up with the other wagons. George Naab was leading a team down a rocky declivity to a pool of yellow water. The other boys were unhitching and unsaddling.

"About three," said Naab, looking at the sun. "We're in good time. Jack, get out and stretch yourself. We camp here. There's the Coconina trail, where the Navajos go in after deer."

It was not a pretty spot, this little rock-strewn glade, where the white, hard trail forked with the road. The yellow water, with its green scum, made Hare sick. The horses drank with loud gulps. Naab and his sons drank of it, though the kegs lashed to the wagons were full of water brought from White Sage. The women filled a pail, and portioned it out in basins, and washed their faces and hands, with evident pleasure. Dave Naab whistled, as he wielded an axe vigorously on a cedar.

It came home to Hare that the tension of the foregoing night and morning had relaxed. Whether to attribute that fact to the distance from White Sage

or to the arrival at the waterhole and Indian trail, Hare could not surmise. But the certainty was further manifested in August's cheerful talk to the horses, as he slipped bags of grain over their noses; in the subdued laughter of the women.

Hare sent up an unspoken thanksgiving that these good Mormons had apparently escaped from the dangers incurred for his sake. He sat with his back to a cedar, and watched the kindling of fires, the deft manipulating of biscuit dough in a basin, and steaming of pots. Right glad was he to be called, for appetite unusual to him answered to the wholesome smell of food.

The generous meal was spread on a canvas cloth, around which men and women sat crosslegged, after the fashion of Indians. Hare experienced difficulty in getting his long legs to consent to the posture, and he wondered how these men, whose legs were longer than his, could sit so easily.

Crowning the contrast of a cheerful dinner after hours of anxiety and abstinence, was to have Snap Naab speak civilly to him, and to see him bow his head meekly as his father asked the blessing, and eat as though he had utterly forgotten he had recently killed a man, and to hear the others talk to him as if they had forgotten it, also.

All had finished eating, except Snap and Dave Naab, when one of the mustangs neighed shrilly, which circumstance would have occasioned no notice on Hare's part but for looks exchanged among the men. The glances were not unintelligible a few minutes later, when a patterning of hoofs came from the cedar forest, and a stream of mounted Indians poured into the glade.

This, perhaps, was why Naab had been so anxious to reach the Coconina trail. The ensuing scene was

intensely interesting. The ugly glade became a place of color and action. The Navajos rode small, racy, wild-looking mustangs, and drove ponies and burros carrying packs, most of which consisted of dried deer hides. Each Indian dismounted, and, untying or unstrapping the blanket that had served as a saddle, gave his mustang a slap, and headed him for the water hole. Then the hides and packs were slipped from the pack train, and soon the pool became obscured in dust and located only by a kicking, snorting, splashing mêlée.

Every cedar tree circling the glade and every branch served as a peg to hang deer meat upon. Some of it was on the haunches, the great majority in dark, dried strips. Long black bows, shiny from service, and quivers full of feathered arrows, leaned against the rocks, and beside them were many short carbines, with whitened stocks and barrels worn bright.

Every sagebush and every low stone held a blanket. A few of these blankets were of solid color, most of them had bars of white and gray and red, the last color predominating.

The mustangs and burros filed out among the cedars, nipping at the sage, and the scattered tufts of spare grass. A group of fires, sending up curling columns of blue smoke, all surrounded by a circle of lean, half-naked, bronze-skinned Indians, cooking and eating, completed a picture that afforded Hare the satisfying, thrilling fulfillment of boyish dreams.

The sun sloped low in the west, sending gleams through the gnarled branches of the cedars, and tingeing the green into gold. At precisely the moment of sunset, the Mormon women broke into soft, sweet song, that had the element of prayer; and the lips of the men moved in silent harmony. Dave Naab, the only one who smoked, removed his pipe for the moment's grace to dying day.

This simple custom over, one of the boys added fuel to the fire, and Snap took a jew's-harp out of his pocket, and began to extract doleful discords from it, for which George kicked at him in disgust, finally causing him to leave the circle, and repair to the cedars, where he banged away with supreme egotism.

"Jack," said August Naab, "our friends, the Navajo chiefs, Scarbreast and Eschtah, are coming to visit with us. Take no notice of them at first. They have great dignity, and if you entered their *hogans*, they would sit for some moments before appearing to see you. Scarbreast is a war chief. Eschtah is the wise old chief of all the Navajos on the Painted Desert. It may interest you to know he is Mescal's grandfather, and thereby hangs a tale I may tell you some day."

Hare tried very hard to appear unaware of it when two tall Indians stalked into the circle of Mormons; he set his eyes on the white heart of the camp fire, and waited. For what must have been several minutes, no one spoke or even moved. The Indians remained standing for that time, then seated themselves.

August Naab greeted them presently in the Navajo language. This was a signal for Hare to use his eyes and ears. Another short interval of silence followed, after which a colloquy ensued between Naab and the chiefs. Hare could see only their blanketed shoulders and black heads.

"Jack, come round here," said Naab presently. "I've been telling them about you. These Indians are hostile to the whites, except my own family. I hope you can make friends with them."

"Howdo," said the chief Naab designated as Eschtah. He had a fine face, with noble brow and falcon eyes.

"Ugh!" grunted Scarbreast, in greeting. Here was a

chief whose name might as well have been Scarface, for the signs of war were there — seams not made by age, and lines traceable to grim conflict. It was a face like a bronze mask, cast in one expression — untamed fierceness.

Hare bowed to each, and felt himself an object of inspection to burning eyes, doubtful, yet not unfriendly.

“Shake,” finally said Eschtah, offering his hand.

“Ugh!” said Scarbreast, extending a bare, silver-braceleted arm.

This sign of friendship afforded Naab much gratification. It was evident he wanted to enlist the sympathies of the Navajo chieftains in the young man’s behalf. In his ensuing speech, which was plentifully emphasized with gestures, he lapsed often into English, saying “Weak — no strong,” when he placed his hand on Hare’s legs, and “Paleface” when he designated that, and “Bad” when he touched the young man’s chest, concluding with the words: “Sick — sick.”

Scarbrest regarded Hare with great earnestness, and when Naab finished, he said: “*Chineago — ping!*” and rubbed his hand over his stomach.

“He says you need meat — lots of deer meat,” translated Naab.

“Sick,” repeated Eschtah, whose English was intelligible. He appeared to be casting about in his mind for additional words to express his knowledge of the white man’s tongue, and, failing, continued in Navajo: “*Tohodena — moocha — malocha.*”

Hare was nonplused at the roar of laughter from the Mormons. August shook like a mountain in an earthquake.

“Eschtah says you hurry, get many squaws — many wives.”

Other Indians, gaunt, russet-skinned warriors, with long, black hair, held close by bands round their foreheads, joined the circle, and, sitting before the fire, clasped their knees, and talked. Hare listened a while, and then, being fatigued, he sought the cedar tree where he had left his blankets. The dry mat of needles made a soft, odorous bed. He placed a sack of grain for a pillow, and, doubling up one blanket to lie upon, he pulled the others over him. Then he watched, and listened.

The cedar wood burned with a clear flame, and occasionally snapped out a red spark. The voices of the Navajos, scarcely audible, sounded "toa's," and "taa's," notes he soon learned were characteristic and dominant, in low, deep murmur. It reminded Hare of something that had before been pleasant to his ear. Then it came to mind — a remembrance of Mescal's sweet voice, and that recalled the kinship between her and the Navajo chieftain. He looked about, locating her in the ring of light.

There was a charm about her like the charm of this twilight hour. Dusty forms passed to and fro under the trees. The tinkle of bells on hobbled mustangs rang from the forest. Coyotes had begun their night quest with wild, long howl. The camp fire burned red, and shadows flickered on the blanketed Indians. The wind now moaned, now lulled, in the cedars.

Hare lay back in his blankets, and saw lustrous stars through the network of branches, and with their white light in his face and the cold wind waving his hair on his brow, he thought of the strangeness of it all, of its remoteness from anything even known to him before, of its inexpressible wildness.

A rush of emotion he failed wholly to stifle, proved to him that he could have loved this life, if — if he

had not of late succumbed to a persistent conviction that he had not long to live. That had submerged him, and, though he could still see the wonder of his situation, the joy that otherwise would have been his filtered out in the feeling of what might have been. Still, Naab's influence exorcised even one sad thought; and he flung it from him in resentment.

Sleep did not come so readily; he was not very well this night; the flush of fever was on his cheek, and the heat of feverish blood burned his body. He raised himself, and resolutely seeking for distraction, once more eyed the camp fire.

Some time must have elapsed during his dreaming, for only three persons were in sight. Naab's broad back bowed, and his head nodded. Across the fire, in its ruddy flicker, sat Eschtah, beside a slight, dark figure. At second glance, Hare recognized Mescal.

Surprise claimed him — not more for her presence there than for the white band binding her smooth, black tresses. She had not worn such an ornament before. That slender band lent her the one touch which made her a Navajo. Was it worn in respect to her aged grandfather? What meant this for a girl reared to Christian teaching? Was it desert blood?

Hare had no answers for these questions. They only augmented the mystery and romance. He fell asleep with the picture in his mind of Eschtah and Mescal, sitting in the glow of the fire, and of Naab, nodding in its shadow.

“Jack, Jack, wake up.” The words broke dully into his slumbers; wearily, he uncovered his eyes. August Naab bent over him, shaking him gently.

“Not so well this morning, eh? Here's a cup of coffee. We're all packed and starting. Drink now, and climb aboard. We expect to make Seeping Springs to-night, forty miles.”

Hare got up presently, and, laboring into the wagon, lay down on the sacks. He had one of his blind, sickening headaches. The familiar lumbering of wheels began, and the clanking of the wagon chain. He had no desire to move. Despite jar and jolt, he dozed at times, awakening to the scrape of the wheel on the leatheren brake.

After a while the rapid descent of the wagon changed to a roll, without the irritating rattle. A level had once more been reached. It was a narrow valley; on one side the green, flow-swelling cedar slope of the mountain; on the other, the perpendicular red wall, with its toppling pinnacles, like spears against the sky.

All day this backward outlook was the same, except that each time he opened aching eyes the valley had lengthened, the red wall and green slope had come closer together in the distance. By and by, there came a halt, and din of stamping horses and sharp commands, and bustle and confusion of camp. Naab spoke kindly to him, but he refused any food, lay still, and went to sleep.

Daylight brought him the relief of a clear head and cooled blood. The camp had been pitched close under the red wall. A huge fern-and-lichen-covered cliff, wet with dripping water, overhung a round pool. A ditch led the water down the ridge to a pond as large as an acre. Cattle stood up to their knees, drinking; others lay on the yellow clay, packed as hard as stone; many were climbing the ridge, and passing down on both sides.

"You look as if you enjoyed that water," remarked Naab, when Hare presented himself at the fire. "Well, it's good, only a little salty. Seeping Springs this is, and it's mine. This ridge we call The Saddle. You see, it dips between wall and mountain, and separates two valleys. This valley we go through to-day is where my

cattle range. At the other end is Silver Cup Spring, also mine. Keep your eyes peeled now, my lad."

How different was the beginning of this day! The sky was as blue as the sea; the valley, soft and gray, snuggled deep in the embrace of wall and mountain. Hare took a place on the seat beside Naab, and faced the descent. The line of Navajos, a graceful, straggling curve of color on the trail, led the way for the wagons.

Naab pointed to a little calf, lying half hidden under a bunch of sage. "That's what I hate to see. There's a calf, just born; its mother has gone in for water, leaving it for the time. And coyotes, wolves, and lions range this valley. We lose hundreds of calves that way."

As far as Hare could see, red and white and black cattle speckled the valley.

"If not overstocked, this range is the best in Utah," said Naab. "I say Utah, but it's really Arizona. The Grand Cañon seems to us Mormons to mark the line. There's enough browse here to feed a hundred thousand cattle. But water's the thing. In some seasons, the springs go almost dry, though Silver Cup holds her own well enough for my cattle."

Hare marked the tufts of grass lying far apart on the yellow earth; evidently, there was only sustenance enough in every two feet of ground to support grass.

"What's that?" he asked, noting a low, rolling cloud of dust, with black bobbing borders.

"Wild mustangs," replied Naab. "There are, perhaps, five thousand on the mountain, and getting to be a nuisance. They are almost as bad as sheep on the browse; and I should tell you that if sheep pass over a range once the cattle will starve. The mustangs are getting too plentiful. There are also several bands of wild horses."

"What's the difference between wild horses and mustangs?"

"I haven't figured that out yet. Some say the Spaniards left horses in here, three hundred years ago. I'm inclined to think the mustangs are native to the mountain, the same as deer, and the horses escaped from settlers and Mormons, and multiplied. Wild! These are wilder than any naturally wild animal that ever ran on four legs. Wait till you get a look at Silvermane or Whitefoot."

"What are they?"

"Wild stallions, born wild, and leaders of bands. Silvermane is an iron gray, with a silver mane, the most beautiful horse I ever saw. Whitefoot is an old, black, shaggy demon, with one white foot. Both stallions ought to be killed. They fight my horses, and lead off the mares. I had a chance to shoot Silvermane on the way over this trip, but he looked so proud, so splendid, that I just laid down my rifle."

"Can they run?" asked Hare eagerly, with the eye of a man who loved a horse.

"Run? Whew! Just you wait till you see Silvermane cover ground! He can look over his shoulder at you, and beat any horse in this country. The Navajos have given up catching him as a bad job. Why — here! Jack! quick, get out your rifle — coyotes!"

Naab pulled on the reins, and pointed to one side. Hare discerned three grayish, sharp-nosed beasts, sneaking off in the sage, and he reached back for his rifle. Naab whistled, stopping the coyotes; then Hare shot. The ball cut a wisp of dust above and beyond them. They loped away into the sage.

"How that rifle spangs!" exclaimed Naab. "It's good to hear it. Jack, you shot high. That's the trouble with men who have never shot at game. They can't hold low enough. Aim low, lower than you want. Ha! there's another — this side — hold ahead of him and low; quick! Too high again."

It was in this way that August and Hare fell far behind the other wagons. The nearer Naab got to his home the more genial he became. When he was not answering Hare's queries, he was vouchsafing information of his own accord, telling about the cattle and the range, the mustangs, the Navajos, the desert — all of which Hare found fascinating.

Naab liked to talk; he had said he had not the gift of revelation, but he certainly had a gift of tongues. When chance afforded a shot at coyotes, he was like a boy. Time after time, Hare missed, and always, low as he would hold, the bullet would cut the sage and whip up the dust above the mark. Naab got out his rifle then, and killed several, which he went for, and fetched to the wagon.

"Every one we kill saves a calf, maybe more than one," he would say. "I cure the skins, after the Navajo fashion. That you must learn, Jack." And he told how skillful the Indians were in tanning a hide, and that their buckskin was the finest ever cured. So the day passed — the most delightful day Hare could remember.

The sun was westerling when they began to climb a ridge. A short ascent, but not to the summit, then a long turn to the right, brought them under a bold bulge of the mountain that shut out the northwest. Camp had been pitched in a grove of trees of a species new to Hare. From under a boulder gushed the spring, clear, sparkling, merry — grateful sight and sound to desert travelers. In a niche of the rock hung a silver cup.

"Jack, no man knows how old this cup is, who put it here, anything about it, except that, before the Mormons came, it was here, used by the Navajos. We named the spring Silver Cup. They have their legend about it. The strange thing is that the cup has never

been lost or stolen. But — could any desert man, or outlaw, or Indian, take it away, after drinking here?"

The cup was nicked and battered, bright on the sides, moss-green on the bottom. When Hare drank from it, he understood.

That evening, rude merriment held forth round the camp fire. Snap Naab banged and buzzed on his jew's-harp, and sang. He got some of the younger braves to dancing, and they stamped and swung their arms, singing, "Hoya-heeya-howya," and there was a lively time.

Hare would have stayed up as late as any of them, but August's saying to him: "Get to bed; to-morrow will be bad!" sent him off to his blankets, where he was soon fast asleep. Morning found him well, hungry, eager to know what the day portended.

"Wait," said August soberly.

They rode out of the gray, cool pocket upon the ridge, and commenced to climb. Hare had not observed the ascent till they were started, and then, as the horses climbed steadily, he grew impatient at the monotonous slope. There was nothing to see; always it seemed that they were soon to reach the summit, but never did. Hare went back to his comfortable place on the sacks.

"Now, Jack," said August.

Hare gasped. He saw a red world. His eyes seemed bathed in blood. Not in his first or second glance did his mind perceive what he saw. Red, scaly ground, bare of vegetation, sloped down, down, far down, to a black, irregular rent in the earth that zig-zagged the plain beneath. To the right it bent its crooked way under the brow of a bold, black-timbered, snow-sloped plateau. To the left, it straightened its sharp angles, to find a V-shaped vent in the red wall, now uplifted to a mountain range. Beyond this earth-

riven line, lay something vast and illimitable — a far-reaching vision of white waste, of purple plains, of low mesas lost in distance. It was the shimmering, many-hued, dust-veiled desert.

"Here we come to the real thing," explained Naab. "This is Windy Slope. That black line is the Grand Cañon of Arizona. On the other side, is the Painted Desert, where the Navjos live. Coconina Mountain shows his flat head, there to the right, and the red wall on our left rises to the Vermilion Cliffs. Now, look while you can, for presently you will not be able to look."

"Why?"

"Wind, sand, dust, gravel, pebbles — have a care for your eyes!"

Naab had not ceased speaking, when Hare saw the train of Indians trailing down the slope, enveloped in red clouds. Then the white wagons disappeared. Soon he was struck in the back by a gust, carrying all for which Naab had prepared him. It swept by; the air grew clear again; once more he could see. But presently, a puff, taking him unawares, filled his eyes with dust, and he was at great pains to get it out. Wherefore, he turned his back to the wind.

The afternoon grew apace. The sun glistened on the white patches of Coconina Mountain; it set; and the wind died.

"Five miles of red sand," said Naab. "This's what kills the horses. Getep."

There was no trail. All before was red sand, hollows, slopes, levels, dunes, in which the horses sank above their fetlocks. The wheels plowed deep, and little streams of red sand trailed down from the tires. Naab trudged on foot, with the reins in his hands. Hare essayed to walk, also, soon tired, and floundered behind, till Naab ordered him to ride

again. Twilight came, with the horses still toiling through soft, dragging sand.

"There! Thankful I am when we get off that strip! But, Jack, that trailless waste of sand prevents a night raid on my home. Even the Navajos shun it after dark. We'll be home soon. There's my sign. See? Night or day, we call it the Blue Star."

High in the black cliff, a star-shaped, wind-worn hole let the blue sky through.

There was cheer in Naab's "getep" now, and the horses quickened with it. Their iron-shod hoofs struck fire from the rocky road. Hare saw where the end of the wall let down the pale light.

"Easy, easy — soho!" cried Naab to his horses.

In the pitchy blackness under the shelving cliff, they picked their way cautiously, and turned a corner. Lights twinkled in Hare's sight; a fresh breeze, coming from water, dampened his cheek; and a hollow rumble, a long roar as of distant thunder, a deep boom, filled his ears.

"What's that?" he asked.

"That, my lad, is what I always love to hear. It means I'm home. It's the roar of the Colorado as she takes her first plunge into the cañon."

IV

THE OASIS

August Naab's oasis was an oval valley, level as a floor, green with leaf and white with blossom, inclosed by a circle of collossal cliffs of vivid vermillion hue. At its western curve the red Colorado River split the red walls from north to south.

When the wind was west, a sullen, rumbling roar, remote, as of some far off driving, monstrous mill, filled the valley. When it was east, a dreamy, hollow hum, a somnolent summer song, murmured through the cottonwoods. When no wind stirred, silence reigned — a silence not of serene plain or mountain fastness, but shut in, compressed, strange, and breathless. Safe from the storms of the elements as well as of the world was this Garden of Eschtah.

Naab had put Hare to bed on the unroofed porch of a long, low log house; had routed him out early, and when Hare threw off the blankets a shower of cotton blossoms from the trees had fallen like a crusting of snow. His first impressions were scarcely more fanciful than his dreams. Falling, pure-white wisps, driftng seeds with sails of cotton, floated softly, alighted noiselessly. A grove of gray-barked trees spread green canopy overhead, and through the lacy intricate web shone crimson walls, soaring with resistless onsweep up and up to shut out all but a round blue lake of sky.

"I want you to see the Navajos cross the river," said Naab.

Hare accompanied him out through the grove to a road that flanked the first scaly rise of the red wall. They followed this for half a mile, and turning a corner came into an unobstructed view. A roar of rushing waters had prepared Hare, but the river that he saw appalled him. It was red and swift; it slid onward like an enormous, slippery snake; it constricted its head, raising a crest of leaping waves, and disappeared in a narrow, dark chasm, whence came a bellow and boom.

"That opening where she jumps off is the head of the Grand Cañon," said Naab. "It's five hundred feet deep there, and thirty miles below it's five thousand. Oh, once in, she tears in a hurry. Come, we turn up the bank here."

Hare could find no speech, and he felt immeasurably small. All that he had seen in reaching this isolated spot was dwarfed in comparison. What majestic concord between river and cliffs! This "Crossing of the Fathers," as Naab called it, was the gateway of the desert. This roar of turbulent waters was the sinister utterance of mighty desert symphony, of great depths, great heights, great sounds.

On a sandy strip of bank the Navajos had halted. The place was as far as they could go, for above it the wall butted into the river. From here the head of the cañon was not visible, being beyond a curve, and the roar of the rapids accordingly lessened in volume. But even in this smooth water the river spoke a warning.

"The Navajos go in here and swim their mustangs across to that sandbar," explained Naab. "The current helps when she's high, there's a three-foot raise on now."

"I can't believe it possible. What danger they must

run! Those little mustangs!" exclaimed Hare.

"Danger? Yes, I suppose so," replied Naab, as if it was a new idea. "My lad, the Mormons crossed here by the hundreds. Many were drowned, I have heard. But this trail and crossing were unknown except to Indians before the Mormon exodus. It later became known as The Crossing of the Fathers. Once a noted Mormon refugee was brought here by Indians and hidden."

The mustangs had to be pulled and driven into the water. Scarbreast led, and his mustang, after vicious kicks and reluctant steps, went over his depth, sousing under, wetting the stalwart chief to the waist. He came up and swam. Barelegged Indians waded in and urged their pack ponies. Shouts, shrill cries, blows mingled with snorts and splashes.

Dave and George Naab in flatboats rowed slowly on the downstream side of the Indians. Presently all mustangs and ponies were in, a long procession widening out in a triangle from Scarbreast the leader. The pack ponies appeared to swim better than the mounted mustangs, or else the packs of deer pelts made them more buoyant.

When one-third way across, the head of the swimming train met the current, and the line of progress broke. Mustang after mustang swept down with a rapidity that showed the power of the current. Yet they swam steadily with flanks shining, tails sometimes under, noses up, and riders holding weapons aloft. But the pack ponies labored when the current struck them, and, sweeping down, and whirling round, they held back the Indians who were leading them, and blocked those behind.

The orderly procession of the start succeeded to a broken line, then a rout. Here and there a Navajo slipped into the water and swam, leading his mustang;

others pulled on pack ponies and beat their mounts; strong-swimming mustangs forged ahead; weak ones hung back, and all obeyed the down-ward will of the current.

While Hare feared for the lives of some of the Navajos, and pitied the laden ponies, he could not but revel in the scene; in the action and varying color, the cries and shrill whoops of the Indians, the snorts of the frightened mustangs, Naab's hoarse yell to his sons as he directed their attention to one thing and another, and the ever-present menacing roar from around the rim bend. The wildness of it all, the necessity of peril and calm acceptance of it, stirred with Hare the call, the awakening, the spirit of the desert.

August Naab's stentorian yell rolled out over the river: "Ho! Dave — the yellow pinto — pull him loose. George, back this way — there's a pack slipping. Down now, down stream, turn that straggler in. Dave, in that tangle — quick! There's a boy drowning — his foot's caught — he's been kicked! Hurry! Hurry! Pull him in the boat. There's a pony under — Too late, George, let that one go — let him go, I tell you!"

But George rowed with powerful strokes down stream to a sinking pony, and held up his head with one hand while he cut loose the pack of hides. It appeared to stick and he could not loosen it; the boat, with idle oars, raced with the current. At last he got the pack off and lifted it into the stern seat. The ears of the pony shot up and sank; it did not reappear. George retrieved the lost distance and soon was among the splashing, snorting crowd again.

So the crossing of the Navajos proceeded, never an instant free from danger in that churning current. It was accomplished, however, without further loss. The mustangs and ponies floundered somewhat on the sand bar, and then parted the willows and appeared

on a trail skirting the red wall. Dave Naab moored his boat on that side of the river, and returned with George.

"We'll look over my farm," said August, as they retraced their steps. He led Hare through fields of alfalfa, in all stages of growth, explaining that it yielded six crops a year. Into one ten-acre lot pigs and cows had been turned to feed at will. Everywhere the ground was soggy; little streams of water trickled down ditches. Adjacent to the field was an orchard, where cherries were red and ripe, apricots already large, plum trees shedding their blossoms, and apple trees just spurting into bloom.

Naab explained that the products of his oasis were abnormal; the ground was exceedingly rich, and could be kept always wet; the reflection of the sun from the red walls robbed even winter of any rigor, and the spring, summer, and autumn were tropical. He pointed at grapevines as large as a man's thigh, and told of bunches of grapes four feet long; he showed sprouting plants on which watermelons and pumpkins would grow so large that one man could not lift them, and told of one pumpkin that held a record of taking two men to roll it.

"I can raise any kind of fruit in such abundance that it can't be used. My garden is prodigal. But we get little benefit, except for our own use, for we cannot transport things across the dessert."

The water that was the prime factor in all this richness of verdure and luxuriance of product came from a small stream which Naab, by making a dam and tunneling a corner of cliff, had diverted from its natural course into his oasis. The main ditch flowed along the red wall, and from it at regular points led waterways so arranged by a system of gates that the flow could be regulated to the needs of the soil.

The length of the farm was fenced on its upper side by smooth logs and poles placed upright in the ground like posts. All these and, in fact, all the wood Naab used, came from drifts along the river, which in May and June, the flood season, was full of trees peeled of bark and shaved of branches.

There was between the fence and the red wall a wide, bare, level flat which extended all the way to the house. At its farthest end was a green inclosure, which Hare saw was the cemetery mentioned by Snap. August evidently had intended to pass by that feature of his wonderful oasis. Hare counted thirty graves, a few with rude monuments of stone, the others marked by wooden headpieces.

"I have the reputation of doctoring the women, and letting the men die," said Naab, with a smile. "I hardly think it's fair. But the fact is, no women are buried here. Some graves are of men I fished out of the river; others of those who drifted here, and were killed or died keeping their secrets. I have numbered those unknown graves, and have kept a description of the men, so, if chance ever made it fall out, I might tell some one where a father or brother lay buried. Five sons of mine, not one of whom died a natural death found graves here — God rest them! Here is the grave of Mescal's father, a Spaniard. He was an adventurer. I helped him over in Nevada when he was ill; he came here with me, got well, and lived nine years, and he died without speaking one word of himself or telling his name."

"What strange ends men come to!" mused Hare. Well, a grave was a grave, wherever it lay. He wondered if he would come to rest in that quiet nook, with its steady light, its simple dignity of bare, plain graves fitting the brevity of life, the littleness of man.

"We break wild mustangs along this stretch," said

Naab, drawing Hare away. "It's a fine run. Wait till you see Mescal on Black Belly tearing up the dust! She's a Navajo for riding."

Three huge corrals filled up a wide, curved space in the red wall. In one corral were the teams that had hauled the wagons from White Sage. In another upward of thirty burros, gray, drooping, long-eared, lazy-looking little fellows half asleep. In the third a dozen or more mustangs and some horses. Hare immediately went into raptures over the last; Snap Naab's cream pinto, a bay, and a giant horse of dull mottled white, coming in for the greatest share of his praise.

"Our best stock is out on the range," said Naab. "The white is Charger, my saddle horse. When he was a yearling he got away and ran wild for three years. But we caught him. He's a weight-carrier and he can run some. You're fond of a horse — I can see that."

"Yes," returned Hare, "but I — I'll never ride again." He said it brightly, smiling the while; still, the look in his eyes belied the cheerful resignation.

"I have not the gift of revelation, yet I seem to see you on a big gray horse with gleaming mane." Naab appeared to be gazing far away.

The cottonwood grove, which embraced the western curve of the oasis, shaded the five log huts where August's grown sons lived with their wives, and his own cabin, which was of considerable dimensions. It had a covered porch on one side, an open one on the other, a shingle roof, and was a roomy and comfortable habitation.

Naab was pointing out the schoolhouse when he was interrupted by childish laughter, shrieks of glee, and the rush of little feet.

"It's recess time," he said.

A frantic crowd of tousle-headed tots were running

from the little log schoolhouse into a bare circle under the trees. There were fourteen of them, from four years of age, up to ten or twelve. Such sturdy, rosy-cheeked, glad-eyed children Hare had never seen.

In a few moments, as if their happy screams were signals, the shady circle was filled with hounds, and a string of puppies, stepping on their long ears, and ruffling turkey gobblers, that gobbled and gobbled, and guinea hens, with their shrill cries, and cackling chickens, and a lame wild goose that hobbled along.

Then there were beautiful shiny pea fowls, screeching clarion calls from the trees overhead, and flocks of singing black birds, and pigeons hovering over and alighting on the house. Last to approach were a woolly white sheep that added his *baa-baa* to the din, and a brown-eared, bald-faced burro that walked in his sleep. These two became the centre of clamor.

After many tumbles, four chubby youngsters mounted the burro, and the others, with loud acclaim, shouting, "Noddle, Noddle, getep, getep," endeavored to make him go. But Noddle nodded and refused to awaken or budge. Then an ambitious urchin of six fastened his hands in the woolly fur of the sheep and essayed to climb to his back. Willing hands assisted him. "Ride him, Billy, ride him. Getep, Navvy, getep."

Navvy evidently had never been ridden, for he began a fair imitation of a bucking broncho. Billy held on, but the smile vanished and the corners of his mouth drew down.

"Hang on, Billy, hang on," cried August Naab, in delight.

Billy hung on a moment longer, and then Navvy, bewildered by the pestering crowd about him, launched out, and butting into Noddle spilled the four youngsters and Billy also into a wiggling heap.

This recess time completed Hare's introduction to

the Naabs. There were Mother Mary, and Judith, and Esther, whom he knew, and Mother Ruth, and her two daughters very like their sisters. Mother Ruth, August's second wife, was younger than Mother Mary, more comely of face, and more sad and serious of expression. The wives of the five sons, except Snap Naab's frail, slight bride, were strong, stalwart women, fit to make homes and rear children.

"Now, Jack, things are moving all right," said August. "For the present you must eat and rest. Walk some, but don't tire yourself. We'll practice shooting a little every day; that's one thing I will spare time for. I've a trick with a gun to teach you. And if you feel able, take a burro and ride. Anyway, make yourself perfectly at home."

Hare found eating and resting to be matters of profound enjoyment. Before he had fallen in with these good people it had been a year since he had sat down to a full meal; longer than he could remember since he had eaten wholesome food. And now he had come to a "land overflowing with milk and honey," as Mother Ruth smilingly said.

He could not choose between roast beef and chicken, so waived the question by taking both, and what with the biscuits and butter, apple sauce and blackberry jam, cherry pie and yellow-cream, there was danger of making himself ill. He told his friends that he simply could not help it, which shameless confession brought August's hearty laugh, and beaming smiles from his women folk.

For several days Hare was remarkably well, for him; he had not a headache or weakening night sweat or consuming fever. He won golden praise from August at the rifle practice, and he began to take lessons in the quick drawing and rapid firing of a Colt revolver.

Naab was wonderfully proficient in the use of both firearms and his skill in drawing the smaller weapon, in which his movement was quicker than the eye, astonished Hare.

"My lad," said August, "it does not follow because I am a Christian that I need not know how to handle a gun. Besides, I like to shoot."

This remark made Hare think, and to him implied the possibility of August's far-sightedness; that as the years had gone by, while living his peaceful and religious life, he had not been dead to what Martin Cole called "the signs of the times."

Hare recalled the disarming of Dene and several other hints of Naab's unobtrusive ability. Would not this praying Mormon, the preaching apostle, some day take the trail of his enemies? How fascinating was the thought!

In these few days Hare added to his knowledge of what conquering the desert made of a man. August Naab was close to threescore years; his chest was wide as a door, his arm like a branch of an oak. He was a blacksmith, a mechanic, a carpenter, a cooper, a potter.

At his forge, and in his shop, everywhere, were crude tools, wagons, farming implements, sets of buckskin harness, odds and ends of nameless things, eloquent and pregnant proof of the fact that necessity was the mother of invention.

He was a mason; the levee that buffeted back the rage of the Colorado in flood, the wall that turned the creek, the tunnel, the zigzag trail cut on the face of the cliff — all these attested to his eye for line, his judgment of distance, his hand for toil.

He was a farmer, a cattleman, a grafter of fruit trees, a breeder of horses, a herder of sheep. He was a preacher. He was a physician. Best and strangest of all in this wonderful man was the instinct and heart to heal.

"I don't combat the doctrine of the Mormon church," he said, "but I administer a little medicine with my healing. I learned that from the Navajos."

The children ran to him with bruised heads, and cut fingers, and stubbed toes, and his great blacksmith's hands were as gentle, as ministering, as quick as a woman's. A mustang with a lame leg claimed his serious attention; a sick sheep gave him an anxious look; a steer with a gored skin brought him with a bucket of salve. He could not pass by a crippled quail. The farm was overrun by Navajo sheep that he had found strayed and lost on the desert.

Anything hurt or helpless had in August Naab a friend. Hare found himself looking up to a great and luminous figure, and he loved this man.

Following those few days, Hare learned many other things. For a while illness confined him to his bed on the porch, where he was happy enough, being weak, though not suffering. At night he lay listening to the roar of the river, and watching the stars. By day he watched the cotton snow down upon him, and listened to the many birds, and waited for the merry show at recess time.

After a short time the children grew less shy and came readily to him. They were the sweetest and most wholesome children he had ever known. Hare wondered about it, and decided it was not so much Mormon teaching as isolation from the world. These children had never been out of their cliff-walled home, and civilization was for them as if it were not. He told them stories, and after school hours they would race for him and climb on his bed, and beg for more.

He exhausted his supply of fairy stories and animal stories, and had begun to tell about the

places and cities that he had visited when the eager-eyed children were peremptorily called within by Mother Mary. This pained him, and he was at a loss to understand it.

Enlightenment came, however, in the way of an argument between Naab and Mother Mary which he overheard.

The elder wife said that the stranger was welcome to the children, but she insisted that they hear nothing of the outside world, and that they be kept to the teachings of the Mormon geography — which made all the world outside Utah an untrodden wilderness.

August Naab did not hold to the letter of the Mormon law; he argued that if the children could not be raised as Mormons, with a full knowledge of the world, they would only be lost in the end to the church.

Other developments surprised Hare. The house of this good Mormon was divided against itself. Precedence was given to the first and elder wife — Mother Mary. Mother Ruth's life was not without pain. The men were gone all day, usually two or more of them for several days at a time, out on the ranges; and this left the women alone. One daughter taught the school, the other daughters did all the chores about the house, from feeding the stock to chopping wood. The work was hard, and the girls would rather have been in White Sage or Lund. They disliked Mescal, and said things inspired by jealousy, and Snap Naab's wife was vindictive, and called Mescal "that little Indian!"

It struck Hare, on hearing this gossip, that he had missed Mescal. What had become of her? Curiosity prompting him, he asked little Billy about her.

"Mescal's with the sheep," piped Billy.

That she was a shepherdess suited Hare, and he

thought of her as free on the open range, with the wind blowing her hair.

One day when Hare felt stronger he took his walk round the farm with new zest. Upon his return to the house he saw Snap's cream pinto in the yard, and Dave's mustang cropping the grass near by. A dusky pack lay on the ground. Hare walked down the avenue of cottonwoods, and was about to turn the corner of the old forge when he stopped short.

"Now, mind you, I'll take a bead on this white-faced spy if you send him up there."

It was Snap Naab's voice, and his speech concluded with the click of teeth characteristic of him in anger.

"Stand there!" August Naab exclaimed in wrath. "Listen! You have been drinking again or you wouldn't talk of killing a man. I warned you. I won't do this thing you ask of me till I have your promise. Why won't you leave the bottle alone?"

"I'll promise," sullenly.

"Very well. Then pack and go across to Bitter Seeps."

"That job will take all summer," growled Snap.

"So much the better. When you come home I'll keep my promise."

Hare moved away silently; the shock of Snap's first words had kept him fast in his tracks long enough to hear the conversation. Why did Snap threaten him? Where was August Naab going to send his son? Hare had no means by which to come to an understanding of either question. He was disturbed in mind and resolved to keep out of Snap's way. He went to the orchard and climbed a cherry tree, but his stay of an hour availed nothing, for on his return, after threading the maze of cottonwoods, he came face to face with the man he wanted to avoid.

Snap Naab, at the moment of meeting, had a black bottle tipped high above his lips.

With a curse he threw the bottle at Hare, missing him narrowly. He was drunk. His eyes were bloodshot.

Hare backed away from the coming onslaught, but he did not move quickly enough, for Snap struck him in the face with his fist, knocking him down.

"If you tell father you saw me drinking I'll kill you," he hissed, and rattling his Colt in its holster, he walked away.

Though dazed and blinded Hare got upon his feet, and walked to his bed, where he fell, not so much from weakness, caused by the blow, as from the fury of his anger. He lay there for a long time with his whole inner being in a state of strife. It gradually wore off as he strained his nerves to calmness. The playground was deserted; no one had seen Snap strike him, for which he was glad. Then his attention was diverted by a clatter of ringing hoofs on the road, and a mustang and a cloud of dust coming with speed of the wind.

"Mescal and Black Bolly!" he exclaimed, and sat up quickly. The mustang turned in the gate, slid to a stop, and stood quivering, restive, tossing thoroughbred head, black as coal, with wild race and fire in every line. Mescal leaped off lightly. A grey form flashed in at the gate and fell at her feet and rose to cavort about her. It was a splendid dog, huge in frame, almost white, wild as the mustang.

This was the Mescal that he remembered, yet somehow different. The sombre gray homespun garments had given place to fringed and beaded buckskin.

"I've come for you," she said.

"For me?" he asked wonderingly, as she approached with the bridle of the black over her arm.

"Down, Wolf!" she cried to the leaping dog.
"Yes. Didn't you know? Father Naab says you're
to help me tend the sheep. Are you better? I hope
so — You have bruised your forehead?"

"I fell down," said Hare stupidly. He was scarcely
himself since that blow. "I — I'm not so well."

He looked up at her, at the black sweep of her hair
under the white band, at her eyes, like jet, and suddenly
realized, with a gladness new and strange to him,
that he liked to look at her, that she was beautiful.

V

BLACK SAGE AND JUNIPER

August Naab appeared on the path leading from his fields.

"Mescal, here you are," he greeted. "How about the sheep?"

"Piute's driving them down to the lower range. He lost a good many while we were gone. There are a thousand coyotes hanging about the flock. Piute saw several big timberwolves, and the track of a bear."

"That's bad," rejoined August. "Jack, there's evidently some real shooting in store for you. We'll pack today and get an early start tomorrow. I'll put you on Noddle; he's slow, but the easiest climber I ever owned. He's like riding . . . what's the matter with you? What's the matter with your face?"

One of his long strides spanned the distance between them. He scrutinized the bruise on Hare's forehead, and touched it with his fingers.

"I fell," said Hare, flushing.

"Lad, I know of few circumstances that justify a lie. That blow was made by a man's fist. Snap struck you."

Hare might still have tried to dissimulate, notwithstanding August's positive affirmation, but one glance at August's stern face showed the uselessness of it. He kept silent.

"Drink makes my son unnatural," said Naab. He breathed heavily, as one in conflict with wrath. "We'll

not wait till tomorrow to go up to the plateau; we'll go at once."

Then quick surprise awakened for Hare in the meaning in Mescal's eyes; he caught only a fleeting glimpse, a dark flash, and it left him with a glow of emotion, eloquent of anger, half pleasure, half pain.

"Mescal," went on August, "go into the house and keep out of Snap's way. Jack, watch me pack. You need to learn these things." In a short time he had packs on three burros. "I could put all this outfit on two burros, but the trail is narrow, and a wide pack might bump a burro off. Let's see, I've got all your stuff but the saddle; that we'll leave till we get a horse for you. Black Bolly there — that's a mustang, Jack. If we could get one like her for you! We captured her when she was a colt . . . Well, all's ready."

Mescal came at his call, and mounting Black Bolly, rode out toward the cliff wall, with Wolf trotting at the fore. Hare got astride Noddle. August, waving good-bye to his women-folk, started the train of burros after Mescal.

How they would be able to climb the face of that steep cliff mystified Hare. Upon nearer view he discovered the yard-wide trail curving upward in cork-screw fashion round a projecting corner of cliff. The stone was a soft red shale, and the trail had been cut in it at a steep angle. It was so steep that the burros appeared to be climbing straight up. Noddle pattered into it, dropped his head and his long ears and slowed to patient plodding. August walked in the rear.

The first thing that struck Hare was the way the burros in front of him stopped at the curves in the trail, and turned in a space so small that their four feet were close together; yet they swung their packs scarcely scraping the wall. They took short steps, and stopped to rest of their own accord, and started again.

At every turn they were higher than he was, going in the opposite direction, yet he could reach out and touch them. He glanced up to see Mescal right above him, leaning forward with her brown hands clasping the pommel. Then he looked out and down; already the green cluster of cottonwoods lay far below. After that sensations thronged swiftly in his mind.

Round and round, up and up, surely, the beautiful mustang led the train. There were sounds of rattling stones, and click of hoofs, and scrape of pack. On one side was the iron-stained cliff, not smooth or glistening at close range, but of dull, dead, rotting rock. On the other, the light grew whiter, and the green oval below smaller, and the blue oval above wider, and the red cliffs opposite farther away.

The trail changed to a zigzag along a seamed and cracked buttress where ledges leaned outward waiting to fall. Then a steeper incline, where the burros crept upward warily, led to a long level ledge heading to the left.

Mescal halted on a promontory and waited. The girl, with her wind-blown hair, the gleam of white band and a dash of red along the fringed leggings, gave inexpressible life and beauty to that wild, jagged point of rock, sharp against the glaring sky.

"This is Lookout Point," said Naab. "I keep an Indian here all the time during daylight. He's a peon, a Navajo slave. He can't talk, as he was born without a tongue, or it was cut out, but he has the best eyes of any Indian I know. You see this point commands the farm, the crossing, the Navajo Trail over the river, the Echo Cliffs opposite, where the Navajos signal to me, and also the White Sage Trail."

The oasis shone under the bare, triangular promontory. The red river with its rising roar wound in bold curve from the split in the cliffs. To the right white-

sloped Coconina brunted the horizon. Forward across the Canyon line opened the glaring desert.

"With this peon watching here I'm not likely to be surprised," said Naab. "That strip of sand protects me at night from approach, and I've never had anything to fear from across the river."

Naab's peon came from a little cave in the wall; and grinned the greeting he could not speak. To Hare's uneducated eye all Indians resembled one another, yet this one stood apart from the others — not differing in blanketed leanness, or straggling black hair, or bronze skin, but in the bird-of-prey cast of his features and the wildness, the prominence, of his eyes. Naab gave him a bag from one of the packs, spoke a few words in Navajo, and then slapped the burros into the trail.

The climb thenceforth was more rapid because less steep, and the trail now led among broken fragments of cliff. The color of the stones had changed from red to yellow, and small cedars grew in protected places. The ride had begun to tell on Hare's strength, and toward the end, as he occasionally saw the rim of the wall above, he thought he could not manage to stay longer upon Noddle. The air had grown thin and cold, and though the sun was yet an hour high, his fingers were numb.

"Hang on, Jack," cheered August. "We're almost up."

At last Black Bolly disappeared, likewise the bobbing burros, one by one, then Noddle, wagging his ears, reached a level. At the same instant that Hare glimpsed a gray-green cedar forest, with yellow crags rising in the background, a rush of cold wind smote his face. For a moment he choked; he could not get his breath. The air was thin and rare, and he inhaled deeply trying to overcome the suffocation.

Presently he divined that the trouble was not with the rarity of the atmosphere, but with the bitter-sweet penetrating odor it carried. He was almost stifled. It was not like the smell of pine, though it made him think of pine trees.

"Ha! that's good!" said Naab, expanding his great chest. "That's air for you, my lad. Can you taste it? The bitter comes from the black sage, the sweet from the juniper. Well, here's camp, your home for many a day, Jack. We always bring the sheep down here in lambing season, because as soon as they begin to drop lambs the coyotes, wolves, lions and bears follow the flock. We couldn't save any lambs up on the high range. There's Piute — how do? How's the sheep?"

A short, squat Indian, good-humored of face, shook his black head till the silver rings danced in his ears, and replied: "Bad! Coyote."

"Piute — shake with Jack. Him shoot coyote — got big gun," said Naab.

"How-do-Jack?" replied Piute, extending his hand, and then straightway began examining and fondling the new rifle. "Heap big gun!"

"Jack, you'll find this Indian one you can trust, for all he's a Piute outcast," went on August. "I've had him with me ever since Mescal found him on the Coconina Trail five years ago. He's devoted to her, and he'll make a good friend for you. What Piute doesn't know about this side of Coconina isn't worth learning."

In a depression sheltered from the wind snugly lay the camp. A fire burned in the centre; a conical tent, like a teepee in shape, hung suspended from a cedar branch and was staked at four points. A leaning slab of rock furnished shelter for camp supplies and for the Indian, and at one end a spring gushed out. A gray-sheathed cedar-tree marked the entrance to this

hollow glade, and under it August began preparing Hare's bed.

"Here's the place you're to sleep, rain or shine or snow," he said. "Now I've spent my life sleeping on the ground, and Mother Earth makes the bed. I'll dig out a little pit in this soft mat of needles; that's for your hips. Then the tarpaulin so; a blanket so. Now the other blankets. Your feet must be a little higher than your head; you really sleep downhill, which breaks the wind. So you never catch cold. All you need do is to change your position according to the direction of the wind. Pull up the blankets, and then the long end of the tarpaulin. If it rains or snows, cover your head, and sleep my lad, sleep to the song of the wind!"

From where Hare lay, resting a weary body, he could see down into the depression which his position guarded. Naab built up the fire; Piute peeled potatoes, with deliberate care; Mescal, on her knees, brown arms bare, kneaded dough in a basin; Wolf crouched on the ground, all his supple white strength outstretched, and watched his mistress; Black Bolly tossed her head, elevating the bag on her nose so as to get all the grain.

Naab called him to supper after a while, and when Hare set to with a will on the bacon and eggs, and hot biscuits, he nodded approvingly.

"That's what I want to see. You must eat. Piute will get a deer, or you may shoot one yourself; eat all the venison you can. Piute will go down to the farm and bring back eggs, butter, everything you need. Remember what Scarbreast said. Then rest. That's the secret. If you eat and rest, you will gain strength. This bench is level for a mile. The sheep will be somewhere on it, and so you'll not have to go far to be near them."

The rim of the wall was not a hundred paces from the camp, and when Hare strolled out to it after supper, the sun had dipped the under side of its red disc behind the desert. He watched it sink, and the golden-red flood of light grow darker and darker. Thought seemed remote from him then; he watched, and watched, until he saw the last spark of fire die from the snow slopes of Coconina. The desert became dimmer and dimmer; the oasis sank its outline, except for a faint light, like a star, into a bottomless purple pit.

The bleating of the sheep roused him, and he returned to camp. The fire was still bright. Wolf slept close to Mescal's tent; Piute was not in sight; and Naab had rolled himself in blankets.

Crawling into his bed, Hare stretched aching legs and lay still, as if he could never move again. Tired as he was, the bleating of the sheep, the clear ring of the bell on Black Bolly, and the faint tinkle of lighter bells on some of the rams, drove away sleep for a while. Accompanied by the sough of the wind through the cedars, the music of the bells was sweet, and he listened till he heard no more.

A thin coating of frost crackled on his bed when he awakened; and out from under the shelter of the cedar all the ground was hoar-white. As he slipped from his blankets the same strong smell of black sage and juniper smote him, almost like a blow. His nostrils seemed pasted together by some rich piny pitch; and when he opened his lips to breathe a sudden pain, as of a knife-thrust, pierced his lungs. The thought following was as sharp as the pain. Pneumonia! What he had long expected!

He sank against the cedar, overcome by the shock. But he rallied presently, for with the reestablishment of his old settled bitterness, which had been forgotten,

cut off by the interest of his situation, he had only to remember that he had given up hope.

He put his hand under his flannel shirt and found the soreness, not at the apex of the right lung, always the one sensitive, but all through his breast. Little panting breaths did not hurt; but the deep inhalation filled his whole chest with thousands of pricking icy needles. In the depth of his breast was a hollow that burned.

When he had pulled on his boots and coat, and had washed himself in the runway of the spring, his hands were so numb with cold they refused to hold his comb and brush; and he presented himself at the roaring fire half-frozen, disheveled, trembling, but cheerful. He would not tell Naab. If he had to die to-day, to-morrow or next week, he would lie down under a cedar and die; he could not whine about it to this man.

"Up with the sun!" was Naab's greeting. What cheer he had, as impelling as his splendid virility! Following the wave of his hand Hare saw the sun, a pale, pink globe through a misty blue, rising between the golden crags of the eastern wall.

Mescal had a shy "good-morning" for him, and Piute a broad smile, and familiar "how-do". The peon slave, who had finished breakfast and was about to depart, moved his lips in friendly greeting that had no sound.

"Did you hear the coyotes last night?" inquired August. "No! Well, of all the choruses I ever heard! There must be a thousand on the bench. Jack, I wish I could spare the time to stay up here with you and shoot some. You'll have practice with the rifle, but don't neglect a little with the Colt. Practice particularly the draw I taught you. Piute has a carbine, and he shoots at the coyotes, but who ever saw an Indian that could hit anything?"

"Ugh! — gun no good!" growled Piute, who evidently understood English pretty well.

Naab laughed, and while Hare ate breakfast he dis-coursed on the sheep. The flock numbered three thousand. They were a goodly part of them Navajo stock, a small, hardy sheep that could live on anything but cactus, and needed little water. This flock had grown from a small number to its present size in a few years. Being remarkably free from the diseases and pests that retard increase in low countries, the sheep had multiplied almost one for one for every year.

In the winter he drove them down into the oasis; the other seasons he herded them on the high ranges where the cattle could not climb. There was grass enough on this plateau for a million sheep. After the spring thaw in early March, occasional snows fell till the end of May, and frost hung on until summer; then the July rains made the plateau a garden.

"Get the forty-four," concluded Naab, "and we'll go out and break it in."

With the long rifle in the hollow of his arm Jack forgot that he was a sick man. When he got within gunshot of the flock the smell of sheep effectually smothered the keen, tasty odor of black sage and juniper. Sheep ranged everywhere under the low cedars. They browsed with noses in the frost, and from all around came the tinkle of tiny bells on the curly-horned rams, and an endless variety of bleats.

"They're spread now," said August. "Mescal drives them on every little while and Piute gets ahead to pick out the best browse. Watch the dog, Jack; he's all but human. His mother was a big shepherd dog that I got in Lund. She must have had a strain of wild blood. Once while I was hunting deer on Coconina she ran off with timber wolves and we thought she

was killed. But she came back, and had a litter of three puppies. Two were white, the other black. I think she killed the black one. And she neglected the others. One died, and Mescal raised the other. We called him Wolf. He loves Mescal, and loves the sheep, and hates a wolf. Mescal puts a bell on him when she is driving, and the sheep know the bell. I think it would be a good plan for her to tie something red round his neck — a scarf, to keep you from shooting him for a wolf."

Nimble, alert, the big white dog was not still a moment. His duty was to keep the flock compact, to head the stragglers and turn them back; and he knew his part perfectly. There was dash, a fire about his work. He never barked. As he circled the flock the small Navajo sheep, edging ever toward forbidden ground, bleated back to the fold, the larger ones wheeled reluctantly, and the old belled rams squared themselves, lowered their brown massive horns as if to butt him. Never, however, did they stand their ground when he reached them, for there was a decision about Wolf which brooked no opposition.

At times when he was working on one side a crafty sheep on the other would steal out into the thicket. Then Mescal called and Wolf flashed back to her, lifting his proud head, eager, spirited, to take his order. A word, a wave of her long whip sufficed for the dog to rout out the recalcitrant sheep and send him bleating to his fellows.

"He manages them easily now," said Naab, "but when the lambs come, the little fellows, hundreds of them, they can't be kept in. The coyotes and wolves hang out in the thickets and pick up the stragglers. The worst enemy of sheep, though, is the silvertip, the old grizzly bear. Usually he is grouchy, dangerous to hunt. He comes into the herd, kills the mother

sheep, and eats the milk-bag — no more! He will kill forty sheep in a night. Piute saw the tracks of one up on the high range, and believes this bear is following the flock. Let's get off into the woods some little way, into the edge of the thickets — for Piute always keeps to the glades — and see if we can pick off a few coyotes. The best time, however, is in the late afternoon."

August cautioned Jack to step stealthily, and slip from cedar to cedar, to use every bunch of sage and juniper to hide his advance.

"Watch sharp, Jack; I've seen two already. Look for moving things. Don't try to see one quiet, for you can't till after your eye catches him moving. They are gray, gray as the cedars, the grass, the ground. Good! Yes, I see him, but don't shoot. That's too far. Wait. They sneak away, but will return. You can afford to make sure. Here now, by that stone — aim low, and be quick."

Jack leveled the rifle, and holding so that there was a faint line of ground between the front sight and the beast he hoped to kill, he pulled the trigger. With the ringing spang came the spat of the bullet, and the coyote flopped over.

Naab started to step off the distance, and Jack followed. The animal looked to him like a wild gray dog. It was shot through the middle, rather to Jack's surprise, for he had expected to see the bullet kick up the dust in front of the coyote. Naab said the distance was eighty-nine yards, called it a fine shot, advised Hare to remember how he had aimed; and, hanging the coyote on a cedar branch, once more cautiously advanced. In the course of a mile, without keeping the sheep near at hand, they saw upward of twenty coyotes, five of which Jack killed in as many shots.

"You've got the hang of it," said Naab, rubbing his

hands. "Why, that's as well as I can do, Jack. You're going to make a great shot. You'll kill the varmints, and then we'll both get rich. Piute will skin and salt the pelts. Now I'm going up the high range to look for bear sign. Go ahead, on your own hook."

Hare took little heed of the passing time while he stole under the cedars and through the thickets, spying out the cunning coyotes. He killed twelve more; and then, seeing a great, gaunt, gray beast loping off, he realized it was a timber wolf, and trembled in his eagerness.

Tree after tree he placed between the beast and himself, and then ran forward. At last, he was within a hundred yards. He thrust the rifle over the branch of a cedar, and, breathless with opportunity, sighted quickly, but forgot to sight low, and the bullet puffed the dust far beyond.

Then Naab's yell, pealing out, claimed his attention; he answered, and directed his steps toward it. When they met, he recounted his last adventure, in mingled excitement and disappointment.

"Are you tired?" asked Naab.

"Tired? No," replied Jack.

"Well, you mustn't overdo, the very first day. It's now the middle of the afternoon. I've got to hurry down to the farm. I've news for you. There are some wild horses on the high range. I didn't see them, but found tracks everywhere. If they come down here, you send Piute to close the trail at the upper end of the bench, and you close the one where we came up. There are only two trails where even a deer can get off this plateau, and both are narrow splits in the wall, which can be closed by the gates. We made the gates to keep the sheep in, and they'll serve a turn. If you get the wild horses on the bench, send Piute for me at once."

They passed the Indian herding the sheep into a corral, built against an uprising ridge of stone. Naab dispatched him to look for the dead coyotes. The three burros were in camp, two wearing empty pack saddles, and Noddle, for once not asleep, was eating from Mescal's hand.

"Mescal, hadn't I better take Black Bolly home?" asked August.

"Mayn't I keep her?"

"Of course. She's yours. But you run a risk. There are wild horses on the range. Will you keep her hobbled?"

"Yes," replied Mescal reluctantly. "Though I don't believe Bolly would run off from me."

"Look out she doesn't go, hobbles and all. Jack, here's the other bit of news I've for you. There's a great big grizzly camping on the trail of our sheep. I saw his tracks. He's a monster. He'll hide up in the rocks till lambing time — then look out! He might pay you a visit before. Now, what I want to know is — shall I leave him to you, or put off important work and come up here to wait for him myself?"

"Why," said Jack slowly, "whatever you say. If you think you can safely leave him to me — I'm willing."

"A grizzly won't be pleasant to face. I never knew one of those sheep killers that would not run at a man, if wounded."

"Tell me what to do."

"If he comes down, it's more than likely to be after dark. Don't risk hunting him then. Wait till morning, and put Wolf on his trail. He'll be up in the rocks, and by holding in the dog you may find him asleep in a cave. However, if you happen to meet him by day, do this: Don't waste any shots. Climb a ledge or tree, if one be handy. If not, stand your

ground. Get down on your knee, and shoot, and let him come. Mind you, he'll grunt when he's hit, and start for you, and keep coming till he's dead. Have confidence in yourself and your gun, for you can kill him. Aim low, and shoot steady. If he keeps on coming, there's always a fatal shot, and that is when he rises. You'll see a bare, light spot on his breast. Put a forty-four into that, and he'll go down."

August had spoken so easily and sincerely, quite as if he were explaining how to shear a yearling sheep, that Jack's feeling fluctuated between amaze and laughter. A day or so back, the Mormon had found him nearly dead on the desert, unable to lift a cup to his lips; now he calmly related the probable action of a ferocious beast, and told him how to meet it. Verily, this desert man was stripped of all the false fears of civilization.

"Now, Jack, I'm off. Good-by and good luck. Mescal, look out for him — So-ho! Noddle! Getep, Biscuit!" And with many a cheery word and slap, he urged the burros into the forest, where they, and his tall form, soon disappeared among the trees.

Piute came stooping toward camp so burdened with coyotes that he could scarcely be seen under the gray pile. With a grunt, he tumbled them under a cedar, and trotted back into the forest for another load.

Jack insisted on assuming his share of the duties about the camp; and Mescal assigned him to the task of gathering firewood, and breaking red-hot sticks of wood into small pieces, and raking them into piles of live coals. Then they ate, these two alone.

Jack did not do justice to the supper; excitement had robbed him of appetite. He told Mescal about how he had crept upon the coyotes, how so many had eluded him, how he had missed the gray wolf. He

plied her with questions about the sheep, and wanted to know if there would be more wolves, and if she thought the silvertip would come. He was quite carried away by the events of the day.

The sunset drew him to the rim. Dark clouds were mantling the desert like rolling smoke from a prairie fire. How weird and changeable! He almost stumbled over Mescal, who sat with her back to a stone. Wolf, lying with his head in her lap, growled.

"There's a storm on the desert," she said. "Those smoky streaks are flying sand. We may have snow tonight. It's colder, and the wind is north. See I've a blanket. You had better get one."

He thanked her, and went for it. Piute was eating his supper, and the peon had just come in. The bright camp fire was agreeable, yet Hare did not feel cold. But he wrapped himself in a blanket, and returned to Mescal, and sat beside her. The sun, now a magenta loop, colored a pall of purple, drifting cloud; the desert lay indistinct in the fore, inscrutable beyond; the cañon lost its line in gloom.

The solemnity of the scene stilled his unrest, the whirl, the thrill, the strange freedom of longings unleashed that day. What had come over him? He shook his head; but with consciousness of self returned a feeling of fatigue, the burning pain in his chest, the bitter-sweet smell of black sage and juniper.

"You love this outlook?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you sit here often?"

"Every evening."

"Is it the sunset that you care for, the roar of the river, or just being here, high above it all?"

"It's that last, perhaps; I don't know."

"Haven't you been lonely?"

"No."

"You'd rather be here with the sheep than be in Lund, or Salt Lake City, as Esther and Judith want to be?"

"Yes."

Any other reply from her would not have been consistent with the impression she was making on him. As yet he had hardly regarded her as a young girl, shy, illusive; she had been part of this beautiful desert land. But he began to see in her a responsive being, influenced by his presence. If the situation was wonderful to him, what must it be for her?

Like a shy, wild creature, unused to men, she was troubled by questions, fearful of the sound of her own voice; yet in repose, when she watched the lights and shadows, she was serene, unconscious, her dark, quiet glance was dreamy and sad, and in it was the sombre, brooding strength of the desert.

Twilight and falling dew sent them back to the camp. Piute and Peon were skinning coyotes by the blaze of the fire. The night wind had not yet risen; the sheep were quiet; there was no sound save the crackle of burning cedar sticks. Jack began to talk, he had to talk; so addressing Piute and the dumb peon, he struck at random into speech, and words flowed with a rush. Piute approved, for he emitted a grunt whenever his intelligence grasped a meaning; and the peon twisted his lips and fixed his diamond eyes upon Hare in rapt gaze. The sound of a voice was welcome to the sentinels of that lonely sheep range.

Jack talked of cities, of ships, of people, of single things in the life he had left, and he discovered that Mescal listened. Not only did she listen — she became absorbed. It was romance to her, fulfillment of vague dreams roused by filterings from an unknown world. Nor did she seek her tent till he ceased; then, with a startled "good night," she was gone.

From under the heavy snugness of his warm blankets, Jack watched out the last wakeful moments of that day of days. A star peeped through the fringe of cedar foliage. The wind sighed, and rose steadily, to sweep over him with breath of ice, with the fragrance, bitter and sweet, of juniper and black sage and a tang of cedar.

But that day was only the beginning of eventful days, of increasing charm, of forgetfulness of self, of time that passed unnoted. Every succeeding day was like its predecessor, only deeper, fuller, shorter. Every day, the hoar frost silvered the dawn; the sheep browsed; the coyotes skulked in the thickets; the rifle spoke truer and truer. Every sunset, Mescal's great, changing eyes mirrored the desert. Every twilight, Jack watched beside her with the wisdom of silence; every night, in the camp-fire flare, he talked to Piute and Peon, thus revealing to Mescal the world of men.

Lambing time came late in May, and Mescal, Wolf, Piute, and Jack knew no rest. Nighttime was safer for the sheep than the day, though the hungry howling of a thousand coyotes made it hideous for the shepherds. All in a day, seemingly, the little, fleecy white lambs came, as if by magic, and filled the forest with piping bleats. Then they were tottering after their mothers, gamboling at a day's growth, willful as youth — and the carnage began.

Boldly, the coyotes darted out of thicket and bush, and many little lambs never returned to their mothers. Gaunt, gray shadows hovered always near; the great timber wolves waited in covert for prey. Piute slept not at all, and the dog, morning and night, wore bloody jaws.

Jack hung up fifty-four coyotes the second day; the third he let them lie, seventy in number. Many times the rifle barrel burned his hands. His aim grew

unerring, so that running, skulking, standing brutes in range dropped in their tracks. Many a gray coyote fell with a lamb in his teeth. It was a hard time for Jack, but harder, he thought, for Mescal, who loved her lambs, and for Wolf, strange, wild, haunted by some spirit of savage progenitor when those gaunt, gray, ghostly wolves lurked in the shadows.

One night, when sheep and lambs were in the corral, and the shepherds rested round the camp fire, the dog rose quivering, sniffed the cold wind, and suddenly bristled, with every hair standing erect.

“Wolf!” called Mescal.

The sheep began to bleat. A rippling crash, a splintering of wood, told of irresistible onslaught on the corral fence.

“*Chus — chus!*” exclaimed Piute.

Wolf, not heeding Mescal’s cry, flashed like a white streak under the dark cedars. The rush of the sheep, pattering across the corral, was succeeded by an uproar.

“Bear! Bear!” cried Mescal, with dark eyes on Jack. He grabbed up his rifle.

“Don’t go,” she implored, her hand on his arm. “Not at night — remember Father Naab said not.”

“Listen! I won’t stand that. I’ll go. Here, get in the tree — quick!”

“No — no — ”

“Do as I say!” It was a command. The girl wavered. He dropped the rifle, and swung her up. “Climb!”

“No — don’t go — Jack!”

With Piute at his heels, Jack ran out into the darkness.

VI

THE WIND IN THE CEDARS

Piute's Indian sense of the advantage of position in attack stood Jack in good stead; he led him up the ledge that overhung one end of the corral. In the pale starlight, the sheep could be seen running in bands, massing together, crowding the fence; and their cries made a deafening din.

The Indian shouted, but Jack could not understand what he said. A large black object was discernible in the shade of the ledge. Piute fired his carbine. Before Jack could bring his rifle up, the black thing moved into startlingly rapid flight. Then spouts of red flame illuminated the corral. As he shot, Jack got fleeting glimpses of the bear moving like a dark streak against a blur of white. For all he could tell, no bullet took effect.

When certain that the visitor had departed, Jack descended into the corral. He and Piute searched for dead sheep; but, much to their surprise, found none. If the grizzly had killed one, he must have taken it with him; and, estimating his strength from the gap he had broken in the fence, he could have run with a sheep without hindering himself. They repaired the break, and returned to camp.

"He's gone, Mescal. Come down," called Jack into the cedar. "Let me help you — there! Wasn't it lucky? He wasn't so brave. Either the flashes from the guns, or the dog, scared him. I was amazed to see how fast he could run."

Piute found wooly brown fur hanging from Wolf's jaws.

"He nipped the brute, that's sure," said Jack. "Good dog! Maybe he kept the bear from — Why, Mescal! You're white — you're shaking. There's no danger. Piute and I'll take turns watching with Wolf."

Mescal silently went into her tent.

The sheep quieted down and made no further disturbance that night. The dawn broke gray, with a cold north wind. Dun-colored clouds rolled up, hiding the tips of the crags on the upper range, and a flurry of snow whitened the cedars. After breakfast, Jack tried to get Wolf to take the track of the grizzly, but the scent had cooled.

Coyotes were troublesome that day, sometimes as many as ten in a band creeping out of the brush; and at such times Jack worked the lever on the Winchester with a sure hand. When night came, Piute lighted a fire on the ledge overhanging the corral, and kept guard.

Several more nights went by, then a week, and still the grizzly did not come. This was an anxious, work-filled time for the shepherds; every day, however, saw the coyotes grow fewer and warier. Every day the little lambs learned something; they did not stray so often or so far.

Jack had exceptional luck one evening, as the flock was working campward. He had hidden under a clump of sage that afforded command over a glade. Out of the tail of his eye, he saw three timber wolves lope into the open. His heart beat fast; these fellows he longed for; he had never killed one. They were coming; the wind was right. He waited, with finger twitching.

How gaunt and gray they were, how noiselessly they moved, how wildly! Presently, they stopped, one behind another, and in that instant Jack fired. Two went down, the other jumped straight into the

cedars, but Jack's second ball broke a leg, and the third, sent with deliberate aim at the crippled, scrambling beast, ended his flight.

Next day Mescal drove the sheep eastward toward the crags, and about the middle of the afternoon reached the edge of the slope. Grass grew luxuriantly, and it was easy to keep the sheep in. Moreover, that part of the forest had fewer trees and scarcely any sage or thickets, so that the lambs were safer, barring danger which might lurk in the seamed and cracked cliffs over-shadowing the open grassy plots.

Piute's task at the moment was to drag dead coyotes to the rim, near at hand, and throw them over. Mescal rested on a stone, and Wolf, reprieved by the well-behaved flock, reclined at her feet.

Jack presently found a fresh deer track, and trailed it into the cedars, then up the slope to where the huge rocks massed.

Suddenly, a cry from Mescal halted him; another, a piercing scream of mortal fright, sent him flying down the slope. He bounded out of the cedars, into the open.

The white, well-bunched flock had spread, and streams of jumping sheep led everywhere, headed frantically from an enormous brown, silver-backed bear.

As he whacked right and left, a terrible brute engine of destruction, Jack sent a bullet into him at long range. Stung, the grizzly whirled, bit at his side, and then reared, with a horrible howl of fury.

But he did not see Jack. He dropped down, and launched his huge bulk for Mescal. A bursting gush of blood rushed back to Jack's heart, and his empty veins seemed to freeze.

The grizzly hurdled the streams of sheep. Terror for Mescal dominated Jack; if he had possessed wings

he could not have flown quickly enough to head the bear. Plunging to a stop that fetched him to his knees, he righted himself, and leveled the rifle. It waved as if it were a stick of willow. The sight described a blurred curve round the bear. Yet he shot — in vain — again — in vain.

Above the bleat of sheep and trample of many hoofs rang out Mescal's cry, despairing.

She had turned helplessly, hands over her breast. Wolf spread his legs before her, and crouched to spring, mane erect, jaws wide.

By some lightning flash of memory, August Naab's words steadied Jack's shaken nerves. He aimed low and ahead of the running bear. Down the beast went in a long, sliding sprawl, with a muffled roar of rage. Up he sprang, dangling a useless leg, to leap forward, still agile and swift. One slap sent the attacking dog aside. Jack fired again. A wrestling, tussling, fury demon now, death-stricken, still instinctive to avenge with last heart beat! Jack aimed low, and shot again.

Slowly now, the grizzly reared, majestic, his frosted coat blood-flecked, his great head sagging. Spang! One wide sweep of paw — forward he sank, slowly, drooping, and stretched all his length, as if to rest.

Mescal, released from paralysis, staggered backward. Between her and the outstretched paw was the distance of one short stride.

Jack, bounding up, made sure the bear was dead before he looked at Mescal. She was faint. Wolf whined about her. Piute came running from the cedars. Fear still lent her eyes a fixed stare.

"I couldn't run — I couldn't move," she said, shuddering. A dark blush drove the white from her cheeks, as she raised her face to Jack. "He would soon have reached me."

Piute added his encomium: "Heap big bear — Jack kill um — big chief!"

Hare laughed away his embarrassment, and turned their attention to the stampeded sheep. It was about dark before they got the flock together again, and they never knew whether they had found them all. Piute was for skinning the bear, but Jack said it could wait, that he must help drive in the sheep.

Supper time was unusually quiet this night, Piute was jovial, but no one appeared willing to talk save Peon, and he could only grimace. The reaction of feeling following Mescal's escape had robbed Jack of strength of voice; he could scarcely whisper. Mescal spoke no word; her long, black lashes hid her eyes; she was silent as on any other night; but there was that in her silence which was eloquent. Wolf, always indifferent save to Mescal, reacted to the subtle change; and, as if to make amends, laid his head on Jack's knees. The quiet hour round the camp fire passed, and sleep claimed them. Another day dawned, awakening them fresh, faithful to their duties, forgetful of what had gone before.

So days slipped by. June came, with more leisure for the shepherds, better grazing for the sheep, heavier dews, lighter frosts, snow squalls half rain, and bursting blossoms on the prickly thorns, wild-primrose patches in every shady spot, and bluebells lifting wan, blue faces to the sun.

The last snowstorm of June threatened all one morning; hung menacing over the yellow crags, in dull, lead clouds waiting for the wind. Then, like ships heaving anchor to a single command, they sailed down off the heights; and the cedar forest became the centre of a whirling, blinding, eddying storm. The flakes were as large as feathers, moist, almost warm. The low cedars changed to mounds of white; the

sheep, drooping curves of snow; the little lambs were lost in the color of their own pure fleece.

As the storm had been long in coming, it was brief in passing. Wind-driven toward the desert, it moaned its last in the cedars, and swept away, a sheeted pall. Out over the cañon it floated, a spreading sphere trailing long veils of white, that thinned out, darkened, failed far above the golden desert. The winding columns of snow merged into straight lines of leaden rain; the rain flowed into vapory mist, and the mist cleared in the gold-red glare of endless level and slope. No moisture reached the parched desert.

Jack marched into camp with a snowy burden over his shoulder. He flung it down, disclosing a small deer; then he flapped the thick white mantle from his coat, and, whistling, kicked the firelogs, and looked abroad at the silver cedars, now dripping under the hot sun, at the rainbows in the settling mists, at the rapidly melting snow on the ground.

"Got lost in that squall. Fine! Fine!" he exclaimed, and threw wide his arms.

"Jack!" said Mescal. "Jack!" Memory had revived some forgotten thing. The dark olive of her skin crimsoned; her eyes dilated and shadowed with rare change of emotion succeeding to calm.

"Jack!" she repeated.

"Well?" he replied, in surprise.

"To look at you! — I never dreamed — I'd forgotten — "

"What's the matter with me?" demanded Jack.

Wonderingly, with glance on him, mind on the past, she replied: "You were dying when we found you at White Sage."

He drew himself up, with a sharp catch in his breath, and stared at her as if he saw a ghost.

"Oh — Jack!" You're going to get well!"

Her lips curved in a smile.

For an instant, Jack Hare spent his soul in searching her face for truth. While waiting for death, he had utterly forgotten it; he remembered now, when life gleamed in the girl's dark eyes. Passionate joy flooded his heart.

"Mescal — Mescal!" he cried brokenly. The eyes were true that shed this sudden light on him; glad and sweet were the lips that bade him hope and live again. Blindly, instinctively, he kissed them — a kiss unutterably grateful, and then fled into the forest, running without aim.

That flight ended in physical exhaustion on the far rim of the plateau. The low, gray-sheathed, spreading cedars seemed to have eyes, and he shunned eyes this hour.

"To think I cared so much," he whispered. "What has happened?"

With time came rest to limbs, to labored breast and lungs, but not to mind. In a heat of passion, of doubt that would not die, he tore open his shirt. The leanness of arms, the flat chest, the hollows were gone! He did not recognize his own body. He breathed to the depths of his lungs. No pain — only exhilaration! He dug his eager, trembling fingers into the firm flesh over the apex of his right lung — the old sore spot, the hateful place, the burning canker of his torture — no pain!

"I wanted to live!" he cried. He buried his face in the fragrant juniper; he rolled on the soft, brown mat of earth, and hugged it close; he cooled his hot cheeks in the wild-primrose clusters. He opened his eyes to new, bright green of cedar, to sky of a richer blue, to a desert, strange, beckoning, entralling as life loomed to him then.

He counted backward a month, two months, more,

and marveled at the swiftness of time. He counted time forward, he looked into the future, and all was beautiful — long days, long hunts, long rides, service to his friend, freedom on the wild steppes, blue-white dawns over yellow, eastern crags, red-gold sunsets over the lilac mountains of the desert. He saw himself in triumphant health and strength, earning day by day the spirit of this wilderness, coming to fight for it, live for it, and, in far-off time, when he had won his victory, to die for it.

Suddenly, his mind was illumined. The lofty plateau, with its healing breath of sage and juniper, had given back strength to him; the silence and solitude and strife of his surroundings had called to something deep within him; but it was Mescal who made this wild life sweet and significant. It was Mescal, the embodiment of the desert spirit. Like a man facing a great, glorious light, Hare divined his love.

Twilight had enfolded the plateau when Hare traced his way back to camp. Mescal was not there. His supper awaited him; Piute hummed a song; Peon sat grimacing at the fire. Hare told them to eat, and he moved away toward the rim.

Mescal was at her favorite seat, with the white dog beside her; and she watched the desert, where the last glow of sunset gilded the mesas. How cold and calm her face, with its dominant cast of the mystic Navajo! A light hovered hauntingly over it, a promise of slow warm smile, a proof of Spanish blood. How still she was! How slight a thing! How strange to him in this new-born character!

"Mescal, when I kissed you I didn't know I loved you, but I know it now."

Her face drooped quickly from its level poise, hiding the brooding eyes; her dark hand trembled on Wolf's head.

"You spoke the truth. I'll get well. I'd rather have had it from your lips than from any in the world. I intend to live my life here, where these wonderful things have come to me. Wonderful things, Mescal! The friendship of the good man who saved me, this wild, free desert, the glory of new hope, strength, life — and love."

He took her hand in his, and whispered: "For I love you. Do you care for me, Mescal? It must be complete. Do you care — a little?"

The wind blew her dusky hair; he could not see her face; he tried gently to turn her to him. The hand he had taken lay warm and shaking in his, but it was not withdrawn. As he waited, in fear, in hope, it became still. Her slender form, rigid within his arm, gradually relaxed, and yielded to him; her face sank on his breast, and her dark hair, loosened from its band, blew across his lips. That was his answer.

He asked no more. Before him, under him, drove immense shadows, formless, pulsating, a chaotic, dim, dense world, night veils and vapors of the desert.

The wind sang in the cedars. No longer a sough, a sigh, a moan, sad as thoughts of a past flown forever, but a song of what had come to him — of hope, of life, of Mescal's love, of the things to be!

VII

SILVERMANE

Little dew fell on the night of July first; the dawn brightened without mists; a hot sun rose; the short summer of the plateau had begun.

Hare, finishing a hearty breakfast, rose with alacrity; his whistle was cut short by the Indian.

“Ugh!” exclaimed Piute, lifting a dark finger. Black Bolly had thrown her nosebag, and slipped her halter, and she moved toward the opening in the cedars, her head high, her black ears straight up.

“Bolly!” called Mescal. The mare did not stop.

“What the deuce?” Hare ran forward to catch her.

“I never knew Bolly to act that way.” said Mescal. “See — she didn’t eat half the oats. Well, Bolly — Jack! look at Wolf!”

The white dog had risen, and stood warily shifting his nose. He sniffed the wind, turned round and round, and slowly stiffened, with his head pointed toward the eastern rise of the plateau.

“Hold, Wolf, hold!” called Mescal, as the dog appeared to be about to dash away.

“Ugh!” grunted Piute.

“Listen, Jack; did you hear?” whispered the girl.

“Hear what?”

“Listen!”

The warm breeze came down in puffs from the crags; it rustled in the cedars, and blew fragrant whiffs of camp-fire smoke in Jack’s face; and, pre-

sently, it bore a low, prolonged whistle. Jack had never heard its like. The sound broke the silence again, clearer, a keen, sharp whistle.

"What is it?" he queried, reaching for his rifle.

"Wild mustangs," said Mescal.

"No!" corrected Piute, vehemently shaking his head. "*Clea! Clea!*"

"Jack, he says 'Horse, horse.' It's a wild horse."

A third time the whistle rang down from the ridge, splitting the air, strong, trenchant, the fiery, shrill challenge of a stallion.

Black Bolly reared straight up.

Jack ran to the rise of ground above the camp, and looked over the cedars. "Oh!" he cried, and beckoned for Mescal. She ran to him, and Piute, tying Black Bolly, hurried after.

"Look! look!" cried Jack. He pointed to a ridge rising to the left of the yellow crags, On the bare summit stood a splendid stallion, clearly silhouetted against the ruddy, morning sky. He was an iron-grey, wild and proud, with long, silver-white mane waving in the wind.

"Silvermane! Silvermane!" exclaimed Mescal. "The leader of the Sevier range of wild horses!"

"What a magnificent animal!" Jack watched him with admiring eyes, as the horse stood long enough to make a never-to-be-forgotten picture, and then moved back along the ridge, and disappeared. Other horses, blacks and bays, showed above the sage for a moment, and they, too, soon passed out of sight.

"He's got some of his band with him," said Jack, bright with excitement. "Mescal, they're down off the upper range, and grazing along easy. The wind favors us. That whistle was just plain fight, judging from what Naab told me of wild stallions. He came to the hilltop, and whistled down defiance to any

horse, wild or tame, that might be below. I'll slip round through the cedars, and block the trail leading up to the other range, and you and Piute close the gate of our trail at this end. Then send Piute down to tell Naab we've got Silvermane."

Jack chose the lowest edge of plateau rim, where the cedars were thickest, for his detour to get behind the wild band; and he ran from tree to tree, avoiding the open places, taking advantage of the thickets, keeping away from the ridge. He had never gone so far as the gate, but, knowing about where the trail led into a split in the crags, he climbed the slope, threaded a way over masses of fallen cliff, between great stones, till he reached the base of the wall. The tracks of the wild-horse band were very fresh and plain in the yellow trail.

Four stout posts guarded the opening, and a number of bars lay ready to be pushed into place. He put them up, making a gate ten feet high, an impregnable barrier. This done, he hurried back to camp.

"Bolly will need more watching today than the sheep, unless I let her loose," Mescal declared. "Why, she pulls and strains so, she'll break that halter."

"She wants to go with the band; isn't that it?" asked Jack.

"I don't like to think so. But Father Naab doesn't trust Bolly, though she's the best mustang he ever broke."

"Better keep her in," replied Jack, remembering Naab's warning. "I'll hobble her, so if she does break loose she can't go far."

When Mescal and Jack drove the sheep in that afternoon, rather earlier than usual, Piute had returned with August Naab, Dave, and Billy, a string of mustangs, and a pack train of burros.

"Hello, Mescal," cheerily called August, as they

came into camp. "Well, Jack — bless me! Why my lad, how fine and brown — and, yes, how you've filled out!" He crushed Jack's hand in his broad palm, and his gray eyes beamed. "I have not the gift of revelation — but, Jack, you're going to get well."

"Yes, I —" Jack had difficulty with his enunciation, but he thumped his breast significantly, and smiled.

"Black sage and juniper!" exclaimed August. "In this air, if a man doesn't go off quickly with pneumonia, always fatal at this altitude, he'll get well. I never had a doubt for you, Jack — and thank God!"

He interrogated Piute and Mescal about the sheep, and was greatly pleased with their report. He shook his head when Jack spread out the huge grizzly pelt, and asked for the story of the killing. Jack made a rather poor showing with the tale, and slighted his share in it, but Mescal told it as it actually happened. And Naab's great hand resounded from Jack's shoulder. Then, catching sight of the pile of coyote skins under the stone shelf, he gave vent to his surprise and delight. After that his conversation reverted to the object of his trip upon the plateau.

"So you've corralled Silvermane? Well, Jack, if he doesn't jump over the cliff, he's ours. He can't get off any other way. How many horses with him?"

"We had no chance to count. I saw at least twelve."

"Good! He's out with his picked band. Weren't they all blacks and bays?"

"Yes."

"Jack, the history of that stallion wouldn't make you proud of him, so I'll not tell it. I only say that we've corralled him by a lucky chance. If I don't miss my guess, he's scented Bolly, and he's after her. He has been a lot of trouble to ranchers all the way from the Nevada line across Utah. The stallions

he's killed, the mares he's led off! Well, Dave, shall we thirst him out, or line up a long corral?"

"Better have a look around to-morrow," replied Dave. "It'll take a lot of chasing to run him down, but there's not a spring on the bench where we can throw up a trap corral. We'll have to chase him."

"Mescal, has Bolly been good since Silvermane came down?"

"No, she hasn't," declared Mescal, and told of the circumstance.

"Bolly's all right," said Billy Naab. "Any mustang will do that. Keep her belled, hobbled."

"Silvermane would care a lot about that, now, if he wanted Bolly, wouldn't he?" queried Dave, in quiet scorn. "Keep her roped and haltered, I say."

"Dave's right," said August. "You can't trust a wild mustang any more than a wild horse."

How true this was, manifested itself in the fact the Black Bolly broke her halter about midnight, and escaped into the forest, hobbled as she was. The Indian heard her first, and he awoke August, who aroused the others.

"Don't make any noise," he said, as Jack came up, throwing on his coat. "There's likely to be some fun here presently. Bolly's loose, broke her rope, and I think Silvermane is close. Listen sharp, now."

What little breeze stirred favored their position; the camp fire was dead; and the night was clear and starlit. They had not been quiet many moments when the shrill neigh of a mustang rang out. The Naabs raised themselves, and looked at one another in the starlight.

"Now, what do you think of that?" whispered Billy.

"No more than I expected. It was Bolly," replied Dave.

"Bolly it was, confound her black hide!" added August. "Now boys, did she whistle for Silvermane, or to warn him, which?"

"No telling," answered Billy. "Let's lie low, and take a chance on him coming close. It proves one thing — we can't break a wild mare. That spirit may sleep in her blood, maybe for years, but some time it'll answer —"

"Shut up — listen!" interrupted Dave.

Jack strained his hearing, yet caught no sound, except the distant yelp of a coyote. Moments went by.

"There!" whispered Dave.

From the direction of the ridge came the faint rattling of stones.

"They're coming," put in Billy.

Presently, sharp clicks preceded the rattles, which soon merged into regular rhythmic tramp. It softened at intervals, probably when the horses were under the cedars, and strengthened when they were out in the open on harder ground, and it came straight for the spring.

"I see them," whispered Dave.

A black, bobbing line wound out of the cedars — a line of horses approaching with drooping heads, hurrying a little as they neared the spring.

"Twenty odd, all blacks and bays," said August, "and some of them are mustangs. But where's Silvermane? Hark!"

Out among the cedars rose the peculiar halting thump of a hobbled horse trying to cover ground, followed by snorts and crashings of brush and the pound of plunging hoofs. The long, black line stopped short, and began to stamp. Then, in the starlit glade below, moved two shadows, the first a great, gray horse with snowy mane, and second a small, shiny, black mustang.

"Silvermane and Bolly!" exclaimed August. "And now she's broken her hobbles!"

The stallion, in the fulfillment of a conquest such as had made him king of the wild ranges, was magnificent in action and mien. Wheeling about her, whinnying, cavorting, he arched his splendid neck, and pushed his head against her. His opportunity was that of a master. Suddenly, Black Bolly snorted, and whirled down the glade. Silvermane whistled one blast of anger or terror, and thundered after her. Bolly was at the last true to her desert blood. They vanished in the gray gloom of the cedars, and the band of frightened horses and mustangs clattered after them.

"It's one on me," remarked Billy. "That little mare played us at the finish. Caught when she was a yearling, broken better than any mustang we ever had, she helped us run down many a stallion, and now she runs off wild with that big, white-maned brute!"

"They'll make a team, and if they get out of here we'll have to chase them to the Great Salt Basin," replied Dave.

"Mescal, that's a fine, well-behaved mustang of yours!" said August. "Not only did she break loose, but she whistled an alarm to Silvermane and his band. Well, roll in now, everybody, and sleep."

At breakfast the following day, the Naabs fell to a discussion as to the probability of means of exit from the plateau, other than the two trails already closed. They had never run any mustangs on the plateau, and in the case of wild horse like Silvermane, that would take desperate chances, it was deemed advisable to know positively before the work of capturing began. So Billy and Dave, taking their mounts from the sheep corral, where they had put them up for the night, rode in opposite directions

round the rim of the plateau. It was triangular in shape, and some six or seven miles in circumference; and the brothers rimmed it in less than an hour.

"Corralled," said Dave laconically.

"Good! Did you see him? What kind of a bunch has he with him?" asked his father.

"If we get the pick of the lot, it will be worth two weeks' work," replied Dave. "I saw him, and Bolly, too. I believe we can catch her easily. She was off from the bunch. It looks as if the mares were jealous. I think we can run her into a cove under the wall, and get her. Then Mescal can help us run down the stallion. And you can look out on this end for the best level stretch to drop the line of cedars and make our trap."

With that the brothers, receiving their father's approval, rode off into the forest. Naab had detained the peon, and gave him orders, and sent him off.

"To-night you can stand on the rim, here, and watch him signal across to the top of Echo Cliffs to the Navajos," explained August to Jack. "I've sent for the best breaker of wild mustangs on the desert. Dave can break mustangs, and Piute is very good; but I want the best man in the country, because this is a grand horse, and I intend to give him to you."

"To me!" exclaimed Hare.

"Yes, and if he's broken right at the start, he'll serve you faithfully, and not try to bite your arm off every day, or kick your brains out. No white man can break a wild mustang to the best advantage."

"Why is that?"

"I don't know, but I have an idea it's bad temper and lack of patience. Just wait till you see this Navajo go at Silvermane!"

After Mescal and Piute drove down the sheep, Jack accompanied Naab to the corral.

"I've brought up your saddle," said Naab, "and you can put it on any mustang here."

What pleasure it was for Jack to be in the saddle again, and to feel the strength in him to remain there! He rode with August all over the western end of the plateau. They came at length to a strip of ground, higher than the bordering forest, that was comparatively free of cedars and brush; and when August had surveyed it once, he slapped his knee with satisfaction.

"Fine! Better than I hoped for! This stretch is about a mile long, and narrow at this end. Now, Jack you see the other side faces the rim, this side the forest, and at the end, here, is a wall of rock; luckily, it curves in a half-circle, which will save us work. We'll cut cedars, and drag them in line, and make a big corral against the rock. From the opening in the corral we'll build two fences of trees, and then we'll chase Silvermane till he's done, run him down into this level, and turn him inside the fence. No horse can break through a close line of cedars. He'll run till he's in the corral, and then we'll rope him."

"Great!" said Jack, all enthusiasm. "But isn't it going to take a lot of work?"

"Rather," said August dryly. "It'll take a week to cut and drag the cedars, let alone to tire out that wild stallion. When the finish comes, you want to be on that ledge where we'll have the corral."

They returned to camp, and, as the afternoon was already waning, prepared the supper. Mescal and Piute soon arrived. Dave and Billy came later, on jaded mustangs. Black Bolly limped behind, stretching a long halter; and, judging by her shaggy, dusty, foam-stained coat, and hanging head, she appeared to be a very wretched and unhappy mustang.

"Not bad," said August examining the lame leg. "She'll be fit in a few days — long before we need

her to help run down Silvermane. Bring the liniment and a cloth, one of you, and put her in the sheep corral to-night."

Mescal's love for the mustang shone in her eyes, while she smoothed out the crumpled mane and petted the slender neck.

When darkness fell, they all assembled on the rim to watch the signals. A fire blazed out of the black void below, and, as they waited, it brightened, and flamed higher.

"Ugh!" said Piute, pointing across to the dark line of cliffs.

"Of course he'd see it first," laughed Naab. "Dave, have you caught it yet? Jack, see if you can make out a fire over on Echo Cliffs."

"No, I can't see any light, except that white star. Have you seen it?"

"Long ago," replied Naab. "Here! Sight along my finger."

"I believe I see it — yes, I'm sure."

"Good. How about you, Mescal?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Jack, look sharp!" said August. "Peon is blanketing his fire. See the flicker? One, two — one, two — one. Now for the answer."

Jack peered out into the shadowy space, star-studded above, ebony below. Far across the depths shone a pinpoint of steady light. The Indian grunted again, and August vented his "Ha!" Then Jack saw the light blink like a star, go out for a second, and blink again.

"That's what I like to see," said August. "We're answered. Now that's all over but the work."

Work it certainly was, as Jack discovered next day. He helped the brothers cut down cedars, while August hauled them into line with his roan. They chose only the smallest trees, but some of these were

so heavy that to move them required a mustang to help the horse.

What with this labor and the necessary camp duties, nearly a week elapsed. In the meantime, Black Bolly recovered from her lameness. Twice the workers saw Silvermane standing on open high ridges, restive and suspicious, with his white mane flying, and his head turned over his shoulder, watching, always watching.

"It'd be worth something to find out how long that stallion could go without water," commented Dave. "But we'll make his tongue hang out to-morrow. It'd serve him right to break him with Black Bolly."

Daylight came, warm and misty; veils unrolled from the desert; a purple curtain lifted from the eastern crags, and became a cloud, then the red sun burned.

Dave and Billy Naab mounted their wiry mustangs, and each led another mount by a halter.

"We'll go to the ridge, cut Silvermane out of his band, and warm him up; then we'll drive him down to this end."

Hare, in his eagerness, found very tedious the time that August delayed about camp, punching new holes in his saddle girth, shortening his stirrups, and smoothing kinks out of his lasso. At last he leisurely saddled the roan, and also Black Bolly.

Mescal came out of her tent ready for the chase. She wore a short skirt of buckskin, and leggings of the same material. Her hair, braided and fastened at the back, was bound by a double band, closely fitting her black head. She gave an impression of lithe, supple strength, and sat astride the saddle as if she were a part of it.

Hare walked, leading two mustangs by the halters,

and Naab and Mescal rode, each also leading two. August tied three mustangs at one point along the level stretch, and three at another. Then he led Mescal and Jack to the top of the stone wall above the corral, where they had a good view of a considerable part of the plateau.

The eastern rise of ground — a sage and juniper slope — was in particularly plain sight. Hare saw a white streak; then Silvermane broke out of the cedars into the sage. One of the brothers raced him half the length of the slope, and then the other, coming out of sight in the brush, while Dave and Billy galloped up to where August had tied the first three mustangs. Here they dismounted, changed saddles to fresh horses, and were off again.

The chase was close and all downhill for the watchers. Silvermane twinkled in and out among the cedars, and suddenly hauled up short on the rim. He wheeled and coursed away toward the crags, and vanished. But soon he reappeared, for Billy had cut across and faced him about. Again he struck the level stretch. Dave was there in front of him. He shot away to the left, and flashed through the glades beyond. The brothers saved their steeds, content to keep him cornered in that end of the plateau.

August then spurred his roan into the scene of action. Silvermane came out on the one piece of rising ground beyond the level, and stood looking backward toward the brothers. When the great roan crashed through the thickets into his sight, he leaped as if he had been stung, and plunged away.

The Naabs had hemmed him in a triangle, Dave and Billy at the broad end, August at the apex, and now the real race began. August chased him up and down, along the rim, across to the long line of cedars, always in the end heading him for the open stretch.

Down this he fled with flying mane, only to be checked by the relentless brothers. To cover this broad end of the open required riding the like of which Hare had never dreamed of. The brothers, taking advantage of the brief times when the stallion was going toward August, changed tired mustangs for fresh ones.

"Ho! Mescal!" rolled out August's yell. That was the call for Mescal to put Black Bolly after Silvermane. Her fleetness made the other mustangs seem slow. In a flash, she was round the corral, with Silvermane between her and the long fence of cedars.

Uttering a piercing snort of terror, the gray stallion lunged out, for the first time panic-stricken, and lengthened his stride in a wonderful way. He raced down the stretch; he ran with his head over his shoulder, watching the little black. Seeing her gaining, he burst into desperate, headlong flight. He saved nothing; he had found his match; he won that first race down the level, but it cost him his best. If he had been fresh, he might have left Black Bolly far behind, but now he could not elude her.

August Naab let him run this time, and Silvermane, keeping close to the fence, passed the gate, ran down to the rim, and wheeled. The black mustang was on him again, holding him in close to the fence, driving him back down the stretch.

The brothers remorselessly turned him, and Mescal, forcing the running now, caught him, lashed his haunches with her whip, and drove him into the gate of the corral.

August and his sons were close behind and blocked the gate. Silvermane's race was nearly run.

"Hold there, boys!" said August. "I'll go in and drive him round and round till he's done; then,

when I yell, you stand aside and rope him as he comes out."

Silvermane ran round the corral, tore at the steep, scaly walls, fell back, and began his weary round again, cracking the stones now with hoofs too heavy to lift. Then as sense and courage gave way more and more to terror, he ran blindly, and every time he passed the guarded gateway, his eyes were wilder, his strides more labored.

"Now!" yelled August Naab.

Mescal drew out of the opening, and Dave and Billy pulled away, one on each side, lassoes swinging loosely.

Silvermane sprang for the vacated opening with something of his old speed. As he went through, yellow loops flashed in the sun, circling, narrowing, and he seemed to run right into them. One loop whipped close round his glossy neck like the twine of a snake; the other caught his head.

Dave's mustang staggered under the violent shock, went to his knees, struggled up, and held firmly. Bill's slid on his haunches, and spilled his rider from the saddle. Silvermane seemed to be climbing into the air.

The August Naab, darting through the gate in a cloud of dust, shot his lasso, catching the right foreleg. Silvermane landed hard, his hoofs striking fire from the stones. For an instant, he strained in convulsive struggle, then fell, heaving and groaning.

In a twinkling, Billy loosened his lasso over a knot, making of it a halter, and the end he tied to a cedar stump.

The Naabs now stood back, and gazed at their prize.

Silvermane was badly spent; he was wet with foam, but no fleck of blood marred his mane; his superb coat showed scratches, but none cut into the flesh.

After a while, he got up, panting heavily, and trembling in every muscle. He was a beaten horse; the noble head bowed; yet he showed no viciousness, only the fear of a trapped animal. He eyed Black Bolly, and then the halter, as if he divined the fatal connection between them.

VIII

THE BREAKER OF WILD MUSTANGS

The few days succeeding the capture of Silvermane, a time brimful of excitement for Hare, he had no word with Mescal, save morning and evening greetings; and when he did come to seek her, with an object in mind that had gathered growth since August Naab's arrival, he learned, to his bewilderment, that she avoided him. She gave him no opportunity to speak with her alone; her accustomed resting place on the rim at sunset knew her no more; early after supper she retired to her tent.

Hare nursed a grievance for forty-eight hours, and then, taking advantage of Piute's absence on an errand down to the farm, and of the Naabs' exceedingly strenuous day with four vicious wild horses in the corral at one time, he walked out to the pasture, where Mescal shepherded the flock.

"Mescal, you have given me no chance to speak with you," he said. "What have I done?"

She looked tired and unhappy, and her gaze, instead of meeting his, wandered to the crags.

"Nothing," she replied.

"Well, then, why be unkind to me? I wanted to know if you'd let me speak to August Naab."

"To Father Naab? Why, about what?"

"About you, of course, and me — that I love you, and want to marry you."

She turned white. "No — no!"

Hare paused blankly, not so much from her refusal as from the unmistakable fear in her face.

"Why not?" he asked presently, with an odd, weighty sense of trouble. There was more here than Mescal's habitual shyness.

"Because he'll be terribly angry."

"With you? With me?"

"He'll take you away."

"Mescal!" Jack drew her into his arms. She resisted and broke from him.

"You must never — never do that again."

"There's something I don't understand," returned Hare. "You're different because they came."

"I remembered." She hung her head.

"What?" queried Jack sharply.

"I am pledged to marry Father Naab's eldest son."

"Pledged! You never told me. You let me fall in love with you. You let me kiss you, Mescal!"

"Jack, I forgot. It was so new, so strange to have you up here. It was like a kind of dream. And after — after you kissed me, I — I found out — "

"What?"

She was silent.

"But, Mescal, if you really love me — we can — there'll be some way — "

"No way," she interrupted.

"But there must be a way," he insisted. "I'm in the dark. What does it all mean? Tell me, Mescal, do you care for me?"

She hid her face from him. "Tell me," he demanded. He took her hands and found them weak and trembling, and suddenly, with the soft warmth of them, a tumultuous thrill throbbed through him and he encircled her with his arms and held her close. "You do care for me — love me. Look at me!" He drew her head back from his breast. Her face was pale and

agitated; her eyes closed tight, with tears forcing a way out under the long lashes. Her lips were parted, and he bowed to their sweet nearness, and kissed them, again and again. "I love you, Mescal. You are mine — I will have you — I will keep you — I will not let him have you!"

She vibrated to that like a keen-strung wire to a strong touch. In a flash the trembling girl was transformed. She leaned back in his arms, supple, pliant with quivering life, and for the first time gave him wide-open level eyes, in which there were now no tears, no shyness, no fear, but a dark, smoldering fire.

"You do love me, Mescal?"

"I — I couldn't help it."

A moment or an hour of unutterable sweetness drifted by.

"Mescal, tell me — about your being pledged," he said, once more realizing the situation.

"I gave my promise because there was nothing else to do. I was pledged to — to him in the church at White Sage. It can't be changed. I've got to marry — Father Naab's eldest son."

"Eldest son?" echoed Jack suddenly mindful of the implication. "Why, that's Snap Naab. Ah! I begin to see light. That — Mescal — "

"I hate him." With the words Jack Hare got a glimpse into the depths of this desert girl. What a brooding, sombre flash!

"You hate him and you're pledged to marry him! . . . Heavens! Mescal, I'd utterly forgotten Snap Naab already has a wife."

"You've also forgotten that we're Mormons."

"Are you a Mormon?" he queried bluntly.

"I've been raised as one."

"That's not an answer. Are you one? Do you be-

lieve that any man under God's sky ought to have more than one wife at a time?"

"No. I've been taught that it gave woman greater glory in heaven. But long I've fought myself. There have been men here before you, men who talked to me, and I doubted before I ever saw you. And afterward — I knew."

"Would not Father Naab release you?"

"Release me? Why, he would have taken me as a wife for himself, but for Mother Mary. She hates me. So he pledged me to Snap."

"Does August Naab love you?" inquired Hare, conscious of a strange retreating perspective of a great figure.

"Love me? No. Not in the way you mean — perhaps as a daughter. But Mormons teach duty to the Church first, and say such love comes — to the wives — after. But it doesn't — not in the women I've seen. There's Mother Ruth — her heart is broken. She loves me, and I can tell."

"When was this — this marriage to be?"

"I don't know. Father Naab promised me to his son when he came home from the Navajo range. It would be soon, if they found out that you and I — Jack, Snap Naab would kill you!"

The sudden thought startled the girl, and her eyes betrayed a woman's terror.

"I mightn't be so easy to kill as I was when he knocked me down that day," said Hare darkly. The words flowed from his lips, his first answer to the wild surroundings that had begun to influence him. "Mescal, I'm sorry — maybe I've brought unhappiness into your life."

"No; no. To be with you has been like sitting there on the rim watching the desert. That and Bolly and Wolf have been my only happiness. I used to love to

be with the children, but Mother Mary forbade. When I am down there, which is seldom, I'm not allowed to play with the children any more."

"What can I do?" asked Hare passionately.

"Don't speak to Father Naab. Don't let him guess. Don't leave me here alone," she answered low. It was not the Indian speaking in her now. Love had sounded depths hitherto unplumbed; a warmth, a light, a quick, soft impulsiveness made the contrast sharp and vivid.

"How can I help but leave you, if he wants me on the cattle ranges?"

"I don't know. You must think. He has been so pleased with what you've done. He's had Mormons up here, and two men not of his church, and instead of killing coyotes they spent their time running after me. You've been ill — besides you're different. He will keep me with the sheep as long as he can; for two reasons — because I drive them best, he says, and because Snap Naab's wife must be persuaded to welcome me in her home."

"I'll stay, if I have to get a relapse and go down on my back again," declared Jack. "But I hate to deceive him, and I shall be — Oh, I *am* deceiving him; for, Mescal, pledged or not — I love you, and I won't give up hope."

Her hands flew to her face again, and tried to hide the dark blush.

"Mescal, there's one question I wish you'd answer. Does August Naab think he'll make a Mormon of me? Is that the secret of his wonderful kindness?"

"Of course, he hopes and believes he'll make a Mormon of you. That's his religion. He's felt that way over all the strangers who ever drifted out here. But he'd be the same to them without his hopes. I don't know the secret of his kindness, but I think he loves everybody and everything. And Jack, he's so

good. All my life I owe to him. He would not let the Navajos take me; he raised me, kept me, taught me. I can't break my promise to him. He has been a father to me, and I love him."

"I think I love him, too," replied Hare simply.

He left her then and mounted the grassy slope and climbed high up among the tottering yellow crags, where he battled with himself. Whatever the charm of Mescal's surrender, the insistence of his love, the prompting of the disgust and scorn for these wiving Mormons, stern hammer strokes of fairness, duty, honor, beat into his brain his debt to the man who had saved him.

Twilight forced Hare from his lofty retreat; and he wended his way campward, weary and jaded, and with a victory over himself. He renounced his hope of Mescal; he returned with a resolve to be true to August, to her, and to himself; bitterness he would not feel. But he feared that intractable something, the lash of insurrection, the rising in him of a spirit which he had come to know in the hour as an assimilation from his wild surroundings. He was subtly changing, and he feared, vaguely, uncertainly what the future held, what he was to become.

"Well, Jack, we rode down the last of Silvermane's band," said August, at supper. "The Navajos came up and helped us out. To-morrow you'll see some fun, when we start to break Silvermane. As soon as that is done I'll go, leaving the Indians to bring the horses down when they're broken."

"Are you going to leave Silvermane with me?" asked Jack.

"Surely. Why, in three days, if I don't lose my guess, he'll be like a lamb. Those desert stallions can be made into the finest kind of saddle horses. I've seen one or two. I want you to stay up here with the

sheep. You're getting well, you'll soon be a strapping big fellow. Then when we drive the sheep down in the fall you can begin life on the cattle ranges, driving wild steers. There's where you'll grow lean and hard, like an iron bar. You'll need that horse, too, my lad."

"Why — because he's fast?" queried Jack, quietly answering to suggestion.

August gloomily nodded his shaggy head. "I have not the gift of revelation, but I've come to believe Martin Cole. Holderness is building an outpost for his riders close to Seeping Springs. He has no water. If he tried to pipe my water — " The pause was not a threat; it implied the Mormon's doubt of himself. "Then Dene is on the march this way. He's driven some of Marshall's cattle from the range next to mine. Some cattle were driven up on the mountains, others to Holderness, and, as they are unbranded, they cannot be picked out. Dene got away with about a hundred head. The barefaced robber sold them in Lund to a buying company from Salt Lake."

"Is he openly an outlaw, a rustler?" inquired Hare.

"Everybody knows it, and he's finding White Sage and vicinity warmer than it was. Every time he comes in, he and his band shoot up things pretty lively. Mormons are slow to wrath. But they are awakening. All the way from Salt Lake to the border, outlaws have come in. They'll never get the power on this desert that they had in the places from which they've been driven. Men of the Holderness type are more to be dreaded. He's a rancher, greedy, unscrupulous, but hard to corner in dishonesty. Dene is only a bad man, a gun fighter. He and all his ilk will get run out of Utah. Did you ever hear of Plummer, John Slade, Boone Helm, any of those bad men?"

"No."

"Well, they were men to fear. Plummer was a sheriff in Idaho, a man high in estimation of his townspeople, but he was the leader of the most desperate band of criminals ever known in the West, so far, and he instigated the murder, or murdered outright, more than one hundred men. Slade was an outlaw, a man killer, fatal on the draw. Helm was a killing machine. These men all tried Utah, and had to get out. But I'm afraid there'll be warm times before that happens, and I'm afraid some of them will be in our ranges. And when you get in the thick of it you'll appreciate Silvermane."

"I surely will. But I can't see that wild stallion with a saddle and a bridle, eating oats like any common horse, and being led to water."

"Well, he'll come to your whistle presently, if I'm not greatly mistaken. You must make him love you, Jack. It can be done with any wild creature. Be gentle, but firm. Teach him to obey the slightest touch of rein, to stand when you throw your bridle on the ground, to come at your whistle. Always remember this: He's a desert-bred horse; he can live on scant browse and little water. Never break him of those best virtues in a horse. Never feed him grain if you can find a little patch of browse. Never give him a drink till he needs it — that's about one-tenth as often as a tame horse. Some day you'll be caught in the desert, and, for these things, Silvermane will carry you out."

Silvermane snorted his defiance from the cedar corral next morning when the Naabs and Indians and Hare appeared. A half-naked, sinewy Navajo with a face as changeless as a bronze mask, sat astride August's blindfolded roan, Charger. He rode bareback except for a blanket strapped upon the horse. He carried only a long, thick halter with a loop and a knot.

When August opened the improvised gate, with its sharp, bayonet-like branches of cedar, the Indian rode into the corral. The watcher climbed to the knoll. Silvermane snorted a blast of fear and anger. August's huge roan manifested uneasiness; he stamped, and shook his head, as if to rid himself of the blinders.

Into the farthest corner of densely packed cedar boughs Silvermane pressed himself and watched. The Indian rode around the corral, circling closer and closer, yet appearing not to see the stallion.

Many rounds he made, closer he got, with the same steady gait. Silvermane left his corner and tried another. The same unwearying round brought Charger and the Navajo by him. Silvermane pranced out of his thicket of boughs; he whistled; he wheeled with shiny hoofs lifting. In an hour the Indian was edging the outer circle of the corral, with the stallion pivoting in the centre, ears laid back, eyes shooting sparks, fight in every line of him. And the circle narrowed inward.

Suddenly the Navajo sent the roan at Silvermane and threw his halter. It spread out like a lasso, and the loop went over the head of the stallion, slipped to the knot and held fast, while the rope tightened. Silvermane leaped up, fore hoofs pawing the air, and the shrill, prolonged sound he emitted was neither whistle, snort, nor screech, but all combined. He came down, missing Charger with his hoofs, sliding off his haunches.

In a whirl of dust the roan drew closer to the gray. Silvermane could no longer back nor rise; he raced around the corral. The roan raced with him, nose to nose. When Silvermane saw he could not shake him, with a demon snort he opened his jaws, rolled back his lip in an angry snarl, white teeth glistening, and tried to bite. But the Indian's moc-

casined foot shot up under the stallion's ear and pressed him back. Then the roan hugged Silvermane so close that half the time the Navajo virtually rode two horses.

But for the rigidity of his arm, the ripple and play and sudden tension of leg muscles, the Indian's work would have appeared light, so dexterous was he, so perfectly at home in his dangerous seat. When he let out a yell, August Naab hauled back the gate, and the two horses, neck and neck, thundered out upon the level stretch.

"Good!" cried August. "Let him rip, now Navvy. All over but the work, Jack. I feared Silvermane would spear himself on some of those dead cedar spikes in the corral. He's safe now."

Jack watched the horses plunge at breakneck speed down the stretch, circle at the forest edge, and come tearing back. Silvermane was pulling the roan faster than he had ever gone in his life, and the dark Indian kept his graceful seat. The speed slackened on the second turn, and decreased, as mile after mile, the imperturbable Indian held roan and gray, side to side, and let them run.

Though a long time passed, Hare lost no interest in the breaking of the stallion. He began to understand the Indian, and to feel what the restraint and drag must have been to the horse. Never for a moment could he elude the huge roan, the tight halter, the relentless Navajo. Gallop fell to trot, and trot to jog, and jog to walk, and hour by hour, without whip or spur or word, the breaker of desert mustangs drove the wild stallion.

If there was cruelty, it was in his implacable slow patience, his farsighted purpose. Silvermane would have killed himself in an hour; he would have cut himself to pieces in one headlong dash, but the steel

arm that held him in suffered him only to wear himself out.

Late that afternoon the Navajo led a dripping, drooping, foam-lashed stallion into the corral, and tied him with the halter, and left him.

Later Silvermane drank of the water poured in the corral trough, and had not the strength or spirit to resent the Navajo's caressing hand on his mane.

Next morning, the Indian rode again into the corral on blindfolded Charger, and dragged Silvermane out on the level and drove him up and down with remorseless, machine-like persistence. At noon he took him back and tied him up and roped him fast.

Silvermane tried to rear, he kicked his tired legs, he snorted, but the saddle went on, strapped with a flash of dark-skinned hands. Then again Silvermane ran the level stretch beside the giant roan, only he carried a saddle now, and, at the first, broke out with free, wild stride, as if to run forever from under the hateful thing. But, as the afternoon waned, he lagged back to the corral.

On the morning of the third day, the Navajo went into the corral without Charger, and he roped the gray, and saddled him. Then he loosed the lassoes, except the one round Silvermane's neck, which he whipped under his fore leg to draw him down. Silvermane heaved a groan that said he never wanted to rise again. Swiftly the Indian knelt on the stallion's head; his dark hands flashed; there was a scream, a click of steel on bone, and proud Silvermane jumped to his feet with a bit between his teeth.

The Navajo rose with him in the saddle, and Silvermane leaped through the corral gate, and out upon the stretch, in a wild, despairing burst of speed. The white mane waved in the wind; the dark, half-naked

savage swayed to the motion. Horse and rider disappeared in the cedars.

They were gone all day. Toward night they appeared on the stretch. The Indian rode into camp, and dismounting, handed the bridle rein to Naab. He spoke no word; his dark, impassiveness invited no comment. Silvermane was dust-covered and sweat-stained. His silver crest had the same proud beauty, his neck still the splendid arch, his head the noble outline, but his was a broken spirit.

"My lad — here," said August Naab, throwing the bridle rein over Hare's arm. "What did I say once about seeing you astride a great gray horse? Ah! Well, take him and know this — You've the swiftest horse in the desert country."

IX

THE SCENT OF DESERT WATER

Soon the shepherds were left to a quiet no longer broken by the whistle of wild mustang, the whoop of hunters, the ring of iron-shod hoofs on the stones. The scream of an eagle, the bleat of a sheep, the bark of a coyote were once more familiar sounds, accentuating the silence of the plateau.

For Hare, time seemed to stand still. Dim in his mind, at rare-occurring moments of reflection, was a distant severance of the present from the future. But in these days he thought little; his whole life was a matter of feeling from without. He arose at dawn, never failing to see the red sun tip the eastern crags. He glowed with the touch of cold spring water, and the morning air. He trailed Silvermane under the cedars and thrilled when the stallion answered his call and thumped the ground with hobbled feet and came his way, learning, day by day, to be glad at the sight of his master.

He rode with Mescal behind the flock; he hunted, hour by hour, crawling over the fragrant brown mats of cedar, through the sage and juniper, up the grassy slopes. He put Silvermane to his fleetest to beat Black Bolly down the level stretch where once the gray, even with freedom at stake, had lost to the black. Then back to camp and fire and curling blue smoke, a supper that testified to busy Piute's farmward trips, sunset on the rim, endless changing desert, the wind

in the cedars, bright stars in the blue, and sleep — so time stood still.

Mescal and Hare were together, or never far apart, from dawn to night. Until the sheep were in the corral, every moment had its duty, from camp work and care of horses, to the many practical problems of the flock, so that they earned the rest on the rim wall at sundown. Only a touch of hands bridged the chasm between them. They never spoke of their love, of Mescal's future, of Jack's return to health; a glance and a smile, scarcely sad, yet not altogether happy — that was all.

The July rains did not come; the mists failed, the dews no longer freshened the grass, the hot sun began to tell on shepherds and sheep. Both sought the shade. The flowers withered first — all the bluebells and lavender patches of primrose, and pale yellow lilies, and white thistle blossoms. Only the deep magenta of cactus and vermillion of Indian paint brush, flowers of the sun, survived the heat.

Day by day the shepherds scanned the sky for storm clouds that did not appear. The spring ran lower and lower. At last the ditch that carried water to the corral went dry, and the margin of the pool began to retreat. Then Mescal sent Piute down for August Naab.

He arrived at the plateau the next day, with Dave, and at once ordered the breaking up of camp.

"It will rain some time," he said, "but we can't wait any longer." Then to Dave: "When last did you see the Blue Star water hole?"

"On my last trip in from Silver Cup, ten days ago," answered Dave. "The water hole was full then."

"Will there be water enough now?" asked August.

"We've got to chance it," Dave declared. "There's no water here; no springs on the upper range where

we can drive sheep; we can't drive them down the home trail. We've got to go round under the Star."

"That's so," August nodded. His ears needed corroboration, because his hopes always influenced his judgment until no hope was left. "I wish I had brought Zeke and George. It'll be a hard drive, though we've got Jack and Mescal to help."

Hot as it was, August Naab lost no time in the start. Piute led the train on foot, and the flock, used to following him, got under way readily. Dave and Mescal rode along the sides, and August with Jack came behind, the pack burros bringing up the rear. Wolf circled them all, keeping the flanks close in, heading the lambs that strayed, and ever vigilant, made the drive orderly and rapid.

The trail to the upper range was wide and easy of ascent, the first of it winding under crags, the latter part climbing long slopes. It forked before the last summit, where dark pine trees showed against the sky, one fork proceeding upward, the other, which Piute took, beginning to go down.

It admitted of no extended view, being shut in for the most part on the left, but there were times when Hare could see a flowing, curving stream of sheep on half a mile of descending trail. Once started down, the flock could not be stopped, that was as plain as Piute's hard task. There were times when Hare could have tossed a pebble on the Indian just below him, yet there were more than three thousand sheep strung out in line between them.

Clouds of dust rolled up, sheets of gravel and shale rattled down the inclines, the clatter, clatter, clatter of little hoofs, the steady *baa-baa-baa* filled the air. Save for the crowding of lambs off the trail, and a jamming of sheep in the corners, the drive proceeded without mishap.

Hare was glad to see the lambs scramble back, bleating for their mothers, and that, though peril threatened at every steep turn, the steady down-flow always made space for the sheep behind. He was glad, too, when through a wide break ahead his gaze followed the face of a red cliff down to the red ground below, and he knew the flock would soon be safe on a level.

A blast as from a furnace smote Hare from this open break in the wall. The air was dust laden, and carried — beside the smell of dust, and the warm breath of desert growths — a dank odor that was unpleasant.

The sheep massed in a flock on a level once more, and the drivers spread to their several positions. The route lay under the bulge of red cliffs, between the base and enormous sections of wall that had broken off and fallen far out. There was no weathering slope; the wind had carried away the smaller stones and particles, and had cut the huge pieces of pinnacle and tower into hollowed forms. This zone of red rim merged into another of strange contrast, the sloping red stream of sand that flowed from the wall of the cañon.

Piute swung the flock up to the left into a kind of amphitheatre, and there halted. The sheep formed a densely packed mass in the curve of wall. Dave Naab galloped back toward August and Hare, and before he reached them shouted out: "The water hole's been plugged!"

"What?" yelled his father.

"Plugged, filled with stone and sand."

"Was it a cave-in?"

"I reckon not. There's been no rain."

August spurred his roan after Dave, and Hare kept close behind them, till they reined in on a muddy

bank. What had once been a water hole was a red and yellow heap of shale, fragments of stones, gravel, and sand. There was no water, and the sheep were bleating.

August dismounted and climbed high above the hole to examine the slope; soon he strode down with giant steps, his huge fists clenched, shaking his gray mane like a lion.

"I've found the tracks," he cried. "Somebody climbed up and rolled the stones — started the cave-in. Who?"

"Holderness' men," said Dave promptly. "They did that for Martin Cole's water hole at Rocky Point. How old are the tracks?"

"Two days, perhaps, but don't think of pursuit. What can be done?"

"Some of Holderness' men are Mormons and others are square fellows. They wouldn't stand for such work as this, and somebody ought to ride in there and tell them."

"And get shot up by the men paid to do the dirty work! No. I won't hear of it. This amounts to nothing; we seldom use this hole, only twice a year, when driving the flock. But it serves to make me fear for Silver Cup and Seeping Springs."

"It makes me fear for the sheep, if this wind doesn't change."

"Ah! I had forgotten the river scent. It's not strong to-night. We might venture if it wasn't for the strip of sand. We'll camp here and start the drive at dawn."

The sun went down under a crimson veil; a dull glow spread fan-shape upward; twilight faded to darkness with the going down of the wind. August Naab paced to and fro before his tired and thirsty flock.

Hare turned to Dave. "I'd like to know," he said, "why those men filled up this water hole."

"Holderness wants to cut us off from Silver Cup

Spring, and this was a half-way water hole," Dave explained. "Probably he didn't know we had the sheep up-land, but he wouldn't have cared. He's set himself to get our cattle range, and he'll stop at nothing. Prospects look black for us. Father never gives up. He doesn't believe yet that we can lose our water. He prays and hopes, and sees good and mercy in his worst enemies."

"If Holderness works as far as Silver Cup, how will he proceed, how go about this thieving of another man's range and water?"

"He'll throw up a cabin, send in his men, drive in ten thousand steers."

"Well, will his men try to keep you away from your own water, or your cattle?" persisted Jack.

"Not openly. They'll pretend to welcome us, and drive our cattle away in our absence. You see there are only five of us to ride the ranges, and we'd need five times five to watch all the stock."

"Then you have no means to check this outrage?"

"There's only one way," said Dave, significantly tapping the black handle of his revolver. "Holderness thinks he pulls the wool over our eyes by talking of the cattle company that employs him. He's the company himself, and he's hand and glove with Dene."

"And I suppose, if your father and you boys were to ride over to Holderness' newest stand, and tell him to get off, there would be a fight."

"We'd never reach him now — that is, if we went together. One of us alone might get to see him, especially in White Sage. If we all rode over to his ranch we'd have to fight his men before we reached the corrals. You yourself will find it pretty warm when you go out with us on the ranges, and if you make White Sage you'll find it hot. You're called 'Dene's spy' there and the rustlers are still looking for you. I wouldn't worry about it, though."

"Why not, I'd like to know?" inquired Hare, with a short laugh.

"Well, if you're like the other Gentiles who have come into Utah, you won't have scruples about drawing on a man. Father says the draw comes natural to you, and you're as quick as he is. Then he says you can beat any rifle shot he ever saw, and that long-barreled gun you've got will shoot a mile. So if it comes to shoot — why, you can shoot. If you want to run — who's going to catch you on that white-maned stallion? We talked about you — George and I; we're mighty glad you're well, and can ride with us."

Long into the night Jack Hare pondered on this conversation with Dave. It opened up a vista of the range life into which he was soon to enter. He tried to silence the voice within that cried out, eager and reckless, for the long rides on the windy open.

The years of his illness returned in fancy, the narrow room with the lamp and the book, and the tears over stories and dreams of adventure never for such as he. How wonderful was life! It was, after all, to be full for him. It was already full. Already he slept on the ground, open to the sky.

He knew himself to be close to strenuous action on the ranges, companion of these sombre Mormons, exposed to their peril, making their cause his cause, their life his life. What of their friendship, their confidence? Was he worthy? Would he not fail?

What a man he must become to approach their simple estimate of him! Because he had found health and strength, because he could shoot, because he had the fleetest horse on the desert — were these reasons for their friendship? No, these were only reasons for their trust. August Naab loved him, Mescal loved him; Dave and George made of him a brother.

"They shall have my life," he muttered.

The bleating of the sheep heralded another day. With the brightening light began the drive over the sand. Under the cliff the shade was cool and fresh; there was no wind; the sheep made good progress. But the broken line of shade crept inward toward the flock, and passed it. The sun beat down, and the wind arose. A red haze of fine sand eddied about the toiling sheep and shepherds.

Piute trudged ahead leading the king ram, old Socker, the leader of the flock; Mescal and Hare rode at the right, turning faces from the sand-filled puffs of wind; August and Dave rode behind; Wolf, as always, took care of the stragglers. An hour went by without signs of distress, and with half the five-mile trip at his back August Naab's voice gathered cheer. The sun beat hotter.

Another hour told a different story — the sheep labored; they had to be forced by urge of whip, by knees of horses, by Wolf's threatening bark. They stopped altogether during the frequent hot sand blasts, and could not be driven. So time dragged. The flock straggled out to a long, irregular line; rams refused to budge till they were ready; sheep lay down to rest; lambs fell.

But there was an end to the belt of sand, and August Naab, at last, drove the lagging trailers out upon the stony bench.

The sun was about two hours past the meridian; the red walls of the desert were closing in; the V-shaped split where the Colorado cut through was in sight. The trail now was wide and unobstructed, and the distance short, yet August Naab ever and anon turned to face the cañon, and shook his head in anxious portent.

It quickly dawned upon Hare that the sheep were behaving in a way new and singular to him. They

packed densely now, crowding toward the centre and fore, many raising heads over the haunches of others and bleating, and they were not in the usual calm, pattering hurry, but nervous, excited, and continually faced west toward the cañon, noses up.

On the top of the next little ridge, Hare noted Silvermane snort in the way he always did when led to drink. There was a scent of water on the wind. Hare caught it, a damp, muggy smell. The sheep had noticed it long before, and now under its nearer, stronger influence began to bleat wildly, to run faster, to crowd without aim.

"There's work ahead. Keep them packed and going. Turn the wheelers," ordered August.

What had been a drive became a flight. And it was well, so long as the sheep headed straight up the trail. Piute had to take to the right to avoid being run down. Mescal rode up to fill his place. Hare got his cue from Dave, and rode along the flank, crowding the sheep inward. August cracked his whip behind.

For half a mile the flock kept to the trail; then, as if by common consent, sheered off to the right. This was a circumstance that transformed August and Dave into charging, yelling, intensely excited men. They galloped to the fore, and into the very faces of the turning sheep, and drove them back. Then the tail end of the flock curved outward.

"Drive them in!" roared August.

Hare sent Silvermane at the deflecting sheep and frightened them into line.

Wolf no longer had power to chase the stragglers; they had to be turned by a horse. All along the flank, noses pointed outward, and here and there sheep wilder than the others leaped forward to lead a widening wave of bobbing woolly backs. Mescal engaged one point, Hare another, Dave another, and

August Naab's roar thundered up and down the constantly broken line.

All this while, as the shepherds fought back the sheep, the flight continued faster eastward, farther cañonward. Each side gained, but the flock gained more toward the cañon than the drivers gained toward the oasis.

By August's hoarse yells, by Dave's stern face and ceaseless swift action, by the increasing din, Hare knew something terrible hung over the flock — what it was he could not tell. He heard the roar of the river rapids, and it seemed that the sheep heard it with him. They plunged madly; they had gone wild from the scent and sound of water. Their eyes gleamed red; their tongues flew out.

Branches of the flock moved at the will of the leaders; there was no aim to the rush of the great body of sheep, but they followed the leaders and the leaders followed the scent. And the drivers headed them off, rode them down, ceaselessly, riding forward to check an outbreak, wheeling backward to check another.

The flight became a rout. Hare was in the thick of dust and din, of the terror-stricken jumping mob, of the ever-starting, ever-widening streams of sheep; he rode and yelled and fired his revolver. The dust choked him, the sun burned him, the flying pebbles cut his cheek. Once he had a glimpse of Black Bolly in a melee of dust and sheep. Dave's mustang blurred in his sight; August's roan seemed to be double. Then Silvermane, of his own accord, was out before them all.

The sheep had almost gained the victory, their keen noses were pointed toward the water; nothing could stop their flight; but still the drivers dashed and yelled, ever fighting, never wearying, never ceasing.

At the last incline, where a gentle slope led down to a dark break in the desert, the rout became a stampede. Left and right flanks swung round, the line lengthened, and round the struggling horses, knee-deep in woolly backs, split the streams to flow together beyond in one resistless river of sheep.

Mescal forced Bolly out of danger; Dave escaped the right flank, August and Hare swept on with the flood, till the horses, sighting the dark canyon, halted to stand like rocks.

"Will they run over the rim?" yelled Hare, horrified. His voice came to him as a whisper.

August Naab, sweat-stained in red dust, haggard, gray locks streaming in the wind, raised his arms above his head, hopeless.

The long nodding line of woolly forms, lifting like the crest of a yellow wave, plunged out and down in rounded billow over the canyon rim. With din of hoofs and bleats the sheep spilled themselves over the precipice, and an awful deafening roar boomed up from the river, like the spreading thunderous crash of an avalanche.

How endless seemed that fatal plunge! The last line of sheep, pressing close to those gone before, impelled by the strange instinct of life to survive, turned their eyes too late on the brink, and perished by their own momentum.

The sliding roar ceased; its echo, muffled and hollow, pealed from the cliffs, then rumbled down the canyon to merge at length in the sullen, dull, continuous sound of the rapids.

Hare removed his fascinated gaze from that narrow iron-walled cleft, the depth of which he had not seen, now had no wish to see; and his eyes fell upon a little Navajo lamb limping in the trail of the flock, headed for the canyon, as sure as its mother in purpose. He

dismounted and seized it to find, to his infinite wonder and gladness, that it wore a string and bell around its neck. It was Mescal's pet.

X

RIDING THE RANGES

The shepherds were home in the oasis that evening, and the next day the tragedy of the sheep was a thing of the past. No other circumstance of Hare's four months with the Naabs had so affected him as this swift, inevitable sweeping away of the flock; nothing else had so vividly told him the nature of this country of abrupt heights and depths.

If Hare had not had many proofs of this Mormon's feeling, he would have thought him callous. August Naab trusted God and men, loved animals, did what he had to do with all his force, and accepted fate. The tragedy of the sheep had been only an incident in a tragical life — that Hare divined with awe.

Mescal sorrowed, and Wolf in sympathy with her, for their occupation was gone. Both brightened when August made known his intention to cross the river to the Navajo range, to trade with the Indians for another flock. He began his preparations immediately; the snow freshets had long run out of the river, the water was low, and he wanted to fetch the sheep down before the summer rains. He also wanted to find out what kept his son Snap so long among the Navajos.

"I'll take Billy and go at once. Dave, you join George and Zeke out on the Silver Cup range. Take Jack with you. Brand all the cattle you can before the snow flies. Get out of Dene's way if he rides over, and

avoid Holderness' men. I'll have no fights. But keep your eyes sharp for their doings."

It afforded Hare much relief that Snap Naab had not yet returned to the oasis, for he felt a sense of freedom which otherwise would have been lacking. He spent the whole of a long, calm, windless summer day in the orchard and the vineyard. The fruit season was at its height. Grapes, plums, pears, melons were ripe and luscious.

Midsummer was vacation time for the children, and they flocked into the trees like birds. The girls were picking grapes; Mother Ruth enlisted Jack in her service at the pear trees; Mescal came, too, and caught the golden pears he threw down, and smiled up at him; Wolf was there, and Noddle; Black Bolly pushed her black nose over the fence, and whinnied for apples; and turkeys strutted, the pea fowls preened their beautiful plumage, the guinea hens ran like quail.

Save for those frowning red cliffs Hare would have forgotten where he was. The warm sun, the yellow fruit, the merry screams of children, the joyous laughter of girls, were pleasant reminders of autumn picnic days long gone but he could not forget, in the face of those insulating, wind-scarred walls.

That night, Hare endeavored to see Mescal alone for a few moments, to see her once more with unguarded eyes, to whisper a few words, to say good-by; but it was impossible.

On the morrow he rode out of the red cliff gate with Dave and the pack horses, a dull ache in his heart; for amid the cheering crowd of children and women who bade them good-by, he caught the wave of Mescal's hand and a look of her eyes that would be with him always. What might happen before he returned — if he ever did return! For he knew now, as well as he could feel Silvermane's easy

stride, that out there under the white glare of desert, the white gleam of the slopes of Coconina, was wild life awaiting him. And he shut his teeth, and narrowed his eyes, and faced it with an eager, strange joy that was in contrast to the pang in his breast.

That morning, the wind dipped down off the Vermilion cliffs and whipped west; there was no scent of river water, and Hare thought of the fatality of the sheep drive, when one day in a year a moistened, dank breeze met the flock on the narrow bench.

Soon the bench lay far behind them. Silvermane kept on in front. Already Hare had learned that the gray would have no horse before him. His pace was swift, steady, tireless.

Dave was astride his Navajo mount, an Indian-bred horse, half mustang, that had to be held in with firm rein. The pack train strung out far behind, trotting faithfully along, with the white packs, like the humps of camels, nodding up and down.

Jack and Dave slackened gait at the foot of the stony divide. It was an ascent of miles, so long that it did not appear steep. Here the pack train caught up, and thereafter hung at the heels of the riders.

From the broad, bare summit, Jack saw the Silver Cup Valley range with eyes that seemed to magnify the winding trail, the long red wall, the green slopes, the dots of sage and cattle. Then he made allowance for months of unobstructed vision; he had learned to see; his eyes had adjusted themselves to distance and dimensions.

Silver Cup Spring lay in a bright green spot close under a break in the rocky slope that soon lost its gray cliff in the shaggy, cedarized side of Coconina.

The camp of the brothers was situated upon this cliff, in a split between two sections of wall. Well sheltered from the north and west winds, was a little

grassy plot which afforded a good survey of the valley and the trails. Dave and Jack received glad greetings from Zeke and George, and Silvermane was an object of wonder, admiration, and pleasure.

Zeke, who had often seen the grey and chased him, too, walked round and round him, stroking the silver mane, feeling the great chest muscles, slapping his flanks.

"Well, well, Silvermane, to think I'd live to see you wearing a saddle and bridle!" he cried. "He's even bigger than I thought he was. There's a horse, Hare! Never will be another like him in this desert. If Dene ever sees that horse, he'll chase him to the Great Salt Basin. Dene's crazy about fast horses. He's from Kentucky, somebody said, and knows a horse when he sees one."

"How are things?" queried Dave.

"We can't complain much," replied Zeke, "though we've wasted some time on old Whitefoot. He's been chasing our horses. It's been pretty hot and dry. Most of the cattle are on the slopes; fair browse yet. There's a bunch of steers gone up on the mountain, and some more round toward the Saddle or the cañon."

"Been over Seeping Springs way?"

"Yes. No change since your trip. Holderness' cattle are ranging in the upper valley. George found tracks near the spring. We believe somebody was watching there, and made off when we came up."

"We'll see Holderness' men when we get to riding out," put in George. "And some of Dene's too. Zeke met Two-spot Chance and Culver below at the spring one day, sort of surprised them."

"What day was that?"

"Let's see, this's Friday. It was last Monday."

"What were they doing over here?"

"Said they were tracking a horse that had broken

his hobbles. But they appeared uneasy, and soon rode off."

"Did either of them ride a horse with one shoe shy?"

"Now I think of it, yes. Zeke noticed the track at the spring."

"Well, Chance and Culver had been out our way," declared Dave. "I saw their tracks, and they filled up the Blue Star water hole — and cost us three thousand sheep."

Then he related the story of the drive of the sheep, the finding of the plugged water hole, the scent of the Colorado, and the plunge of the sheep into the cañon.

"We've saved one — Mescal's belled lamb," he concluded.

Neither Zeke nor George had a word in reply. Hare thought their silence unnatural. Neither did the mask-like stillness of their faces change. But Hare saw in their eyes a pointed clear flame, vibrating like a compass needle, a mere glimmering spark.

"I'd like to know," continued Dave, calmly poking the fire, "who hired Dene's men to plug the water hole. Dene couldn't do that. He loves a horse, and any man who loves a horse couldn't fill a water hole in this desert."

Hare entered upon his new duties as a range rider with a zeal and energy that made up somewhat for his lack of experience, and bade fair to develop him into a right-hand man for Dave, under whose watchful eye and guidance he worked. His natural qualifications were soon manifested; he could ride, though his seat was awkward and clumsy compared to that of the desert rangers — a fault that Dave said would correct itself as time fitted him close to the saddle and to the swing of his horse.

His sight had become extraordinarily keen for a newcomer on the ranges, and when experience had familiarized him with his surroundings, so that he knew the landmarks, the trails, the distances, the difference between smoke and dust and haze, when he could distinguish a band of mustangs from cattle, and range riders from outlaws or Indians — in a word, when he had learned to know what it was that he saw, to trust his judgment, he would have acquired the cardinally important feature of a rider's training. But he did not show any budding genius in the handling of a lasso — that next indispensable requirement of his new calling.

"It's funny," said Dave patiently, "you can't get the hang of it. Maybe it's born in a fellow. Now, handling a gun seems to come natural for some fellows, and you're one of them. If only you could get the rope away as quick as you can throw your gun!"

Jack kept faithfully and determinedly at it, unmindful of defeats, often chagrined when he made a mess of some easy opportunity. Not improbably he might have failed altogether if he had been riding an ordinary horse, or if he had to whirl a rope from a fiery mustang. Silvermane, however, was as intelligent as he was beautiful and fleet, and he learned rapidly the agile turns and sudden stops necessary; and as for free running, he never got enough.

Out on the range, Silvermane always had his head up, and watched; his life had been spent in watching; he saw cattle, riders, mustangs, deer, coyotes, every moving thing. So that Hare, in the chasing of a cow, had but to start Silvermane, and then he could devote himself to the handling of his rope.

It took him ten times longer to lasso the cow than

it took Silvermane to head the animal. Dave laughed at some of Jack's exploits, encouraged him often, praised his intent, if not deed; and always, after a run, nodded his head at Silvermane in mute admiration.

Branding cows and yearlings and tame steers that watered at Silver Cup, and never wandered far away, was play, according to Dave's version.

"Wait till we get after the wild steers up on the mountain and in the cañons," he would say, when Jack dropped like a log at supper.

Work, it certainly was for him. At night, he was so tired that he could scarcely crawl into bed; his back felt as if it were broken; his legs were raw, and his bones ached. Many mornings he thought it impossible to arise, but always he crawled out, grim and haggard, and hobbled round the camp fire, to warm up his sore, bruised muscles. Then, when Zeke and George would ride in with the horses, the day's work would begin.

During these weeks of his "hardening up," as Dave called it, Hare endured much muscular pain, but he continued well, and never missed a day. At the most trying time, when for a few days he had to be helped on and off Silvermane — for he insisted that he would not stay in camp — the brothers made his work as light as possible. They gave him the branding outfit to carry, a running iron, and a little pot with charcoal and bellows; and, with these, he followed the riders at a convenient distance and leisurely pace.

Sometimes they branded one hundred cattle. By October, they had August Naab's crudely fashioned cross on thousands of cows and steers. Still the stock kept coming down from the mountain, driven to the valley by cold weather and snow-covered grass. It was well into November before the riders finished at Silver Cup, and then arose a question as to whether it would be advisable to go to Seeping Springs or the

cañons farther west along the slope of Coconina. George favored the former, but Dave overruled him.

"Father's orders," he said. "He wants us to ride Seeping Springs last, because he'll be with us then; and Snap, too. We're going to have trouble over there."

"How is this branding stock going to help the matter any, I'd like to know?" inquired George. "We Mormons never needed it."

"Father says we'll all have to come to it. Holderness' stock is branded. Perhaps he's marked a good many steers of ours. We can't tell. But if we have our own branded, we'll know what's ours. If he drives out stock, we'll know it; if Dene steals, it can be proved that he steals."

"Well, what then? Do you think he'll care for that, or Holderness, either?"

"No, only it makes this difference — both things will then be barefaced robbery. We've never been able to prove anything, though we boys *know*; we don't need any proof. Father gives these men the benefit of a doubt. We've got to stand by him. I know, George, your hand's begun to itch for your gun. So's mine. But we've orders to obey."

Many gullies and cañons headed up on the slope of Coconina, west of Silver Cup, and ran down, to open wide on the flat desert. They contained plots of white sage, and bunches of rich grass, and clear, cold springs. The steers that ranged these ravines were wild as wolves, and, in the tangled thickets of juniper and manzanita and jumbles of weathered cliff, were exceedingly difficult to catch.

Well it was that Hare had received his initiation, and had become inured to rough, incessant work, for he came to know the real stuff of which these Mormons were made. No obstacle barred them finally.

They penetrated the gullies to the last step; they

rode weathered slopes that were difficult for deer to stick upon; they thrashed the impenetrable, bayonet-guarded manzanita copses; they climbed into labyrinthine rocky fastnesses, to every little rock where a steer could hide.

Miles of sliding slope and narrow, marble-bottomed stream beds were ascended on foot, for cattle could climb where a horse could not. Climbing was arduous enough, yet the hardest and most perilous toil began when a wild steer was cornered. They roped the animals on moving slopes of weathered stone, and branded them on the edges of precipices.

The days and weeks passed — how many no one counted or cared. The circle of the sun daily lowered over the south end of Coconina; and the black snow clouds crept down the slopes. Frost whitened the ground at dawn, and held half the day in the shade. Winter was at the heels of the long autumn.

As for Hare, true to August Naab's assertion, he had lost flesh, and suffered; and, though the process was heart-breaking in its severity, he hung on till he hardened into a leather-lunged, wire-muscled man, capable of keeping pace with his companions.

He began his day with the dawn, when he threw off the frost-coated tarpaulin. The icy water brought him a glow of exhilaration; he inhaled deeply of the spiced cold air; and there was the spring of the deer hunter in his step as he went down the slope for his horse. He no longer feared that Silvermane would run off. The gray's bell could always be heard near camp in the mornings, and, when Hare whistled, there came always the answering thump of hobbled feet.

When Silvermane saw him coming through the cedars, or across the grassy belt of the valley, he would neigh his gladness. Hare had come to love Silvermane, and talked to him and treated him as if he were human.

When the mustangs were brought into camp, the day's work began — the same work as that of yesterday, with endless variety, with ever-present problems, with ever-changing situations that called for quick wits, steel arms, stout hearts, and unflagging energies. The darkening blue sky and backward glances at the sun-tipped crags of Vermilion Cliffs, were signals to start them to camp. They ate like wolves, and sat around the camp fire, a ragged, weary, silent group; and soon lay, with dark faces, in the shadow of the cedars.

In the beginning of this toil-filled time, Hare had resolutely set himself to forget Mescal, and he had succeeded during the period when he was so sore and weary that he scarcely thought at all. But she came back to him, and from thenceforth there was seldom an hour that was not hers. The long months, which seemed years, since he had seen her, the change in him wrought by labor and peril, the deepening friendship between him and Dave, even the love he bore Silvermane — these, instead of making dim the memory of the dark-eyed girl, only made him tenderer in thought of her.

Snow drove the riders from the cañon camp down to Silver Cup, where they found August Naab and Snap, who had ridden in the day before.

"Now, you couldn't guess how many cattle are back there in the cañons," said Dave to his father.

"I haven't any idea," answered August dubiously.
"Five thousand head."

"Dave!" His father's tone was incredulous.

"Yes. You know we haven't been back in there for years. The stock has multiplied rapidly, in spite of the lions and wolves. Not only that, they're safe from the winter, and are not likely to be found by Dene or anybody else."

"How do you make that out?"

"The first cattle we drove in there used to come back here to Silver Cup to winter. Then they stopped coming, and we sort of gave them up. Well, they've got a trail round under the Saddle, and they go down, and winter in the cañon. In summer, they head up those rocky gullies, but they can't get up on the mountain. So it isn't likely any one will ever discover them. They are wild as deer, and fatter than any stock on the ranges."

"Good! That's the best news I've had in many a day. Now, boys, we'll ride the mountain slope toward Sleeping Springs, and drive the cattle down, and finish up this branding. Somebody ought to go to White Sage. I'd like to know what's going on, what Holderness is up to, what Dene is doing, if there's any stock being driven to Lund."

"I told you I'd go," said Snap Naab.

"I don't want you to," replied his father. "I guess it can wait till spring, then we'll all go in. I might have thought to bring you boys out some clothes and boots. You're pretty ragged. Jack, there, especially, looks like a scarecrow. Has he worked as hard as he looks?"

"Father, he never lost a day," replied Dave warmly, "and you know what riding is in these cañons."

August Naab looked at Hare, and laughed. "It'd be funny, wouldn't it if that outlaw Chance should try to kick you now, or Holderness slap you, as he once did? I always knew you'd do, Jack; and now you're one of us, and you have a share with my sons in the cattle."

This pleasant news in no wise off-set the feeling aroused in Hare by the presence of Snap Naab. With the first sight of Snap's sharp face and strange eyes, Hare became conscious of an inward burning, experienced several times before, but never as now, when

there seemed to be a flame curling within his breast.

To do Snap justice, he seemed greatly changed. The red flush, the swollen lines were no longer present in his face; evidently, in his absence on the Navajo desert, he had had no liquor; he was good-natured, lively, much inclined to joking, and he seemed to have entirely forgotten his animosity toward Hare.

It was easy for Hare to see that the man's evil nature was in the ascendancy only when he was under the dominance of drink. But he could not forgive; he could not forget. Mescal's dark, beautiful eyes haunted him. Even now she might be married to this man. Perhaps that was why Snap appeared to be in such cheerful spirits.

Hare's inward burning grew into hot, scorching pain. Suspense added its burdensome, insistent question, but he could not bring himself to ask August if the marriage had taken place.

For a day he fought to resign himself to the inevitableness of the Mormon custom, to forget Mescal; and then he gave up trying. This surrender he felt to be something crucial in his life, though he could not wholly understand it. It was the darkening of his spirit; the death of boyish gentleness; the concluding step from youth into a forced manhood.

The desert regeneration had not stopped at turning weak lungs, vitiating blood, flaccid muscles into a powerful man; it was at work on his mind, his heart, his soul: They answered more and more to the call of some outside ever-present, fiercely subtle thing.

Thenceforth, he no longer vexed himself by trying to forget Mescal; if she came to mind, he told himself the truth — that the weeks and months had only added to his love. And, though it was bittersweet, there was relief in truth to himself. He no

longer blinded himself by hoping, striving to have generous feelings toward Snap Naab; he called the hot burning feeling by its real name — “jealousy” — and knew it would become hatred.

On the third morning after leaving Silver Cup, the riders were working slowly along the slope of Cocomina; and Hare, having driven down a bunch of cattle, found himself on an open ridge near the temporary camp. Happening to glance up the valley, he saw what appeared to be smoke hanging over Seeping Springs.

“That can’t be dust,” he soliloquized. “Looks blue to me.”

He studied the hazy, bluish cloud for some time; but it was so many miles away that he could not be certain whether it was smoke or not. He decided to ride over, and make sure.

None of the Naabs were in camp, and there was no telling when they would return; so he set off alone. He expected to get back before dark, but it was of little consequence whether he did or not, for he had his blanket under the saddle, and grain for Silvermane and food for himself in the saddle-bags.

Long before Silvermane’s easy trot had covered half the distance, Hare recognized the cloud that had made him curious. It was smoke. He doubted not that range riders were camping at the springs, and he meant to see what they were about. After three hours of brisk travel, he reached the top of a low, rolling knoll, that hid Seeping Springs.

He remembered that the Springs were up under the red wall, and that the pool where the cattle drank was lower down in a clump of cedars. He saw smoke rising in a column from the cedars, and he heard the bellowing of cattle.

"Something wrong here," he muttered.

Following the trail, he rode through the cedars, to come upon the dry hole where the pool had once been. There was no water in the flume. The bellowing cattle came from beyond the cedars, down the other side of the ridge. He was not long in reaching the open, and then one glance made all clear.

A new pool, large as a little lake, shone in the sunlight, and round it a jostling, horned mass of cattle were pressing against a high corral. The flume that fed water to the pool was fenced all the way up to the springs.

Jack slowly rode down the ridge with eyes roving under the cedars and up to the wall. Not a man was in evidence.

When he got to the fire, he saw that it was not many hours old, and was surrounded by fresh boot and horse tracks in the dust. Piles of slender pine logs, trimmed flat on one side, were proof of somebody's intention to erect a cabin. In a rage, he flung himself from the saddle. It was not many moments' work for him to push part of the fire under the fence, and part of it against the pile of logs. The pitch pines went off like rockets, driving the thirsty cattle back.

"I'm going to trail those horse tracks," said Hare.

He tore down a portion of the fence inclosing the flume, and gave Silvermane a drink, then put him to a stiff trot on the wide, white trail. The tracks he had resolved to follow were clean-cut. A few inches of snow had fallen in the valley, and, melting, had softened the hard ground.

Silvermane kept to his gait with the tirelessness of a desert horse. August Naab had once said fifty miles a day would be play for the stallion. All afternoon, Hare watched the white trail speed toward him, and the end of Coconina rise above him. Long before

sunset, he had reached the slope of the mountain, and had begun the ascent. Halfway up he came to the snow, and counted the tracks of three horses.

At twilight, he rode into the glade where August Naab had waited for his Navajo friends. There, in a sheltered nook among the rocks, he unsaddled Silvermane, covered and fed him, built a fire, ate sparingly of his meat and bread, and, rolling up in his blanket, was soon asleep.

He was up and started before the sunrise, and came out on the western slope of Coconina, just as the shadowy gray valley awakened from its misty sleep into daylight. Soon the Pink Cliffs leaned out, glimmering and vast, to change from gloomy gray to rosy glow, and then to brighten and to redden in the morning sun.

The snow thinned and failed, but the iron-cut horse tracks showed plainly in the trail. At the foot of the mountain, the tracks left the White Sage trail, and led off to the north toward the cliffs. Hare searched the red, sage-spotted waste for Holderness' ranch. He located it — a black patch on the rising edge of the valley under the wall — and turned Silvermane into the track that pointed straight toward it.

The sun cleared Coconina, and shone warm on his back; the Pink Cliffs lifted higher and higher before him. From the ridge tops, he saw the black patch grow into cabins and corrals. As he neared the ranch, he came into rolling pasture land, where the bleached grass shone white and the cattle were ranging in the thousands.

This range had once belonged to Martin Cole, and Hare thought of the bitter Mormon, as he noted the snug cabins for the riders, the rambling, picturesque ranch house, the large corrals, and the long flume that

that ran down from the cliff. There was a corral full of shaggy horses, and another full of steers, and two lines of cattle, one going into a pond corral, and one coming out. The air was full of dust. A bunch of yearlings were licking at huge lumps of brown rock salt. A wagon full of cowhides stood before the ranch house.

Hare reined in at the door, and hallooed.

A red-faced ranger, with sandy hair and twinkling eyes, appeared.

"Hello, stranger, get down, an' come in," he said.

"Is Holderness here?" asked Hare.

"No. He's been to Lund, with a bunch of steers. I reckon he'll be in White Sage by now. I'm Snood, the foreman. Is it a job ridin' you want?"

"No."

"Say! Thet hoss!" exclaimed Snood. His gaze of friendly curiosity had moved from Hare to Silvermane. "You can corral me if it ain't thet Sevier range stallion, Silvermane!"

"Yes," said Hare.

Snood's whoop brought three riders to the door; and, when he pointed to the horse, they stepped out, with good-natured grins and admiring eyes.

"I never seen him but wunst," said one.

"Lordy, what a hoss!" Snood walked round Silvermane. "If I owned this ranch, I'd trade it fer thet stallion. I know Silvermane. He an' I hed some chases over in Nevada. An', stranger, who might you be?"

"I'm one of August Naab's riders."

"Dene's spy!" Snood looked Hare over carefully, with much interest, and without any show of ill will. "I've heerd of you. An' what might one of Naab's riders want of Holderness?"

"I rode in to Seeping Springs yesterday," said Hare, eyeing the foreman. "There was a new pond,

fenced in. Our cattle couldn't drink. There were a lot of trimmed logs. Somebody was going to build a cabin. I burned the corrals and logs — I trailed fresh tracks from Seeping Springs to this ranch."

Snood flung out an oath, and his face flamed. "See here, stranger, you're the second man to accuse some of my riders of such dirty tricks. That's enough for me. I was foreman of this ranch till this minute. I was foreman, but there were things goin' on thet I didn't know of. I kicked on thet deal with Martin Cole. I quit. I steal no man's water. Is thet good with you?"

Snood's query was as much a challenge as a question. He bit savagely at his pipe.

Hare offered his hand. "Your word goes. Dave Naab said you might be Holderness' foreman, but you weren't a liar or a thief. I'd believe it, even if Dave hadn't told me."

"Them fellars you tracked rode in here yesterday. They're gone now. I've no more to say, except that I never hired them."

"I'm glad to hear it. Good day, Snood, I'm in something of a hurry."

With that, Hare faced about in the direction of White Sage. Once clear of the corrals, he saw the village closer than he had expected to find it. He walked Silvermane most of the way, and jogged along the rest, so that he reached the village in the twilight. Memory served him well. He rode in as August Naab had ridden out, and arrived at the bishop's barnyard, where he put up his horse. Then he went to the house.

It was necessary for him to introduce himself, for none of the bishop's family recognized in him the young man they had once befriended. The old bishop prayed, and reminded him of the laying on of hands. The women served him with food, the young men brought him new boots and garments to replace

those that had been worn to tatters. Then they plied him with questions about the Naabs, whom they had not seen for nearly a year. They rejoiced at his recovered health; they welcomed him with warm words.

Later, Hare sought an interview alone with the bishop's sons, and told them of the loss of the sheep, of the burning of the new corrals, of the tracks leading to Holderness' ranch.

In turn, they warned him of his danger, and gave him information desired by August Naab. Holderness' grasp on the outlying ranges and water rights had slowly and surely tightened; every month he acquired new territory; he drove cattle regularly to Lund, and it was no secret that much of the stock came from the eastern slope of Coconina; he could not hire enough riders to do this work.

A suspicion that he was not a cattleman, but a rustler, had slowly gained ground. His friendship with Dene had become offensive to the Mormons who had formerly been on good footing with him. A fight between his men and Dene's had come to be considered only a ruse. Dene's killing of Martin Cole was believed to have been a Holderness' instigation. Cole had threatened Holderness. Then Dene and Cole had met in the main street of White Sage. Cole's death ushered in the bloody time that he had prophesied.

Dene's band had grown, no man could say how many men he had or who they were. Chance and Culver were openly his lieutenants, and when ever they came into the village there was shooting. There were ugly rumors afloat in regard to their treatment of Mormon women. The wives and daughters of once peaceful, religious White Sage dared no longer venture out of doors after nightfall. There was more money in

coin, and more whiskey than ever known before in the village. Lund and the few villages northward were terrorized, as well as White Sage. It was a hard story.

The bishop and his sons tried to persuade Hare next morning to leave the village without seeing Holderness, urging the futility of such a meeting.

"I will see him," said Hare. He spent the morning at the cottage, and when it came time to take his leave, he smiled into the anxious faces. "If I weren't able to take care of myself, August Naab would never have said so."

Had Hare asked himself what he intended to do when he faced Holderness, he could not have told. His feelings were pent in, bound; and, at the bottom, something rankled. His mind seemed steeped in still thunderous atmosphere.

How well he remembered the quaint, wide street, the gray church, the square, still green! As he rode, many persons stopped to gaze at Silvermane. He turned the corner into the main thoroughfare. A new building had been added to the several stores. Mustangs stood, bridles down, before the doors; men lounged along the railings.

As he dismounted, he heard the loungers speak of his horse, and he saw their leisurely manner quicken. He stepped into the store, to meet more men, among them August Naab's friend, Abe. Hare might never have been in White Sage, for all the recognition he found, but he excited something keener than curiosity. He asked for spurs, a clasp knife, and some other necessaries; and he contrived, when momentarily out of sight behind a pile of boxes to whisper his identity to Abe.

The Mormon was dumfounded. When he came out of his trance, he showed his gladness, and, at a

question of Hare's, he silently pointed toward the saloon.

Hare faced the open door. The room had been enlarged; it was now on a level with the store floor, and was blue with smoke, foul with fumes of rum, and noisy with the voices of dark rugged men.

A man in the middle of the room was dancing a jig.

"Hello! Who's this?" he said, straightening up.

It might have been the cessation of his dancing, or the look on his face, or both, that suddenly quieted the room. Hare had once vowed to himself that he would never forget the scarred face; it belonged to the outlaw, Chance.

The sight of it flashed into the gulf of Hare's mind like a meteor into black night. The calm, strange, unreasoning mood of the preceding days went out with a madness that raced through his veins. A hot wave swelled over him.

"Hello! Don't you know me?" he said, with one long step, that brought him close to Chance.

The outlaw stood groping among past associations. Was this an old friend, or an enemy? His beady eyes scintillated and twitched, as if they wanted to rove over the stranger's person, yet dared not, because it was only in the face that intention could be read.

The intense stillness of the room broke to a hoarse whisper from some one:

"Look how he packs his gun."

Another man, answering, whispered: "There's not six men in Utah who wear a gun that way."

Chance heard these whispers, for his eye shifted downward the merest fraction of a second. The brick color of his face turned a dirty white.

"Do you know me?" demanded Hare.

Chance's answer was a spasmodic jerking of his hand toward his hip. Hare's arm moved quicker, and Chance's Colt went spinning to the floor.

"Too slow," said Hare. Then he flung Chance backward, and struck him blows that sent his head, with sudden thuds, against the log wall. Chance sank to the floor in a heap.

Hare kicked the outlaw's gun out of the way, and wheeled to the crowd. Holderness stood foremost, his tall form leaning against the bar, his clear eyes shining like light on ice.

"Do you know me?" asked Hare curtly.

Holderness started slightly. "I certainly don't," he replied.

"You slapped my face once." Hare leaned close to the rancher. "Slap it now — you rustler — you thief!"

In the slow, guarded instant when Hare's gaze held Holderness and the other men, a low murmuring ran through the room:

"Dene's spy!" suddenly burst out Holderness.

Hare slapped his face. Then he backed a few paces, with his right arm held before him almost as high as his shoulder, the wrist rigid, the fingers quivering.

"Don't try to draw, Holderness. That's August Naab's trick with a gun," cried a man, in fierce, hurried whisper.

"Holderness, I made a bonfire over at Seeping Springs," said Hare. "I burned the new corrals your men built, and I tracked them to your ranch. Snood threw up his job when he heard it. He's an honest man, and no honest man will work for a water thief, a cattle rustler, a sheep killer. Your mask's off, Holderness. Leave the country before some one kills you — understand, before some one kills you!"

Holderness stood upright against the bar as if glued there, a flare of terrible fury in his eyes.

Hare backed step by step to the outside door, his right hand still high, his look holding the crowd bound to the last instant. Then he slipped out, scattered the group round Silvermane, and struck hard with the spurs.

The gray, never before spurred, broke down the road into his old, wild speed.

Men were crossing from the corner of the green square. One, a compact little fellow, swarthy, dark hair long and flowing, with a handsome, jaunty air, was Dene, the outlaw leader. He stopped, with his companions, to let the horse cross.

Hare guided the thundering stallion slightly to the left of the men.

“Dene’s spy!” he yelled, when close upon them, and jerked the rein.

Silvermane swerved, and in two mighty leaps bore down on the outlaw. Dene saved himself by quick action in falling aside, but even as he fell, Silvermane struck him with his left fore leg, sending him into the dust.

At the street corner, Hare glanced back. Yelling men were piling from the saloon, and some of them fired upon him. The bullets whistled harmlessly behind Hare. Then the corner house shut off his view.

Silvermane lengthened out, and stretched lower, with his white mane flying and his nose pointed level for the desert.

XI

THE DESERT HAWK

Toward the close of the next day, Jack Hare arrived at Sleeping Springs. A pile of gray ashes marked the spot where the trimmed logs had lain. Round the pool ran a black circle, hard packed into the ground by many hoofs. Even the board flume had been burned to a level with the glancing sheet of water. Hare was slipping Silvermane's bit, to let him drink, when he heard a halloo.

Dave Naab galloped out of the cedars, and presently August Naab and his other sons appeared with a pack train.

"Now you've played hob!" exclaimed Dave. He swung out of his saddle, and gripped Hare with both hands. "I know what you've done; I know where you've been. Father will be furious, but don't you care."

The other Naabs trotted down the slope, and lined their horses before the pool. The sons stared in blank astonishment.

The father surveyed the scene slowly, and then fixed gray, wrathful eyes on Hare.

"What does this mean?" he demanded, with the sonorous roll of his voice in anger.

Hare recounted all that had happened.

August Naab's gloomy face worked, and his eagle gaze had the strange, far-seeing light remarkable to it when his mind dwelt on his mystic power of revelation.

"I see — I see — "

"*Ki — yi-i-i!*" Dave Naab yelled with all the power of his lungs. His head was back, his mouth wide, his face red, his neck corded and swollen with the intensity of the passion which went out in that Indian yell.

"Be still — boy!" ordered his father. "Hare, this was madness — but tell me what you learned."

Briefly, Hare repeated all that he had been told at the bishop's, and concluded with the killing of Martin Cole by Dene.

August Naab bowed his head, and his giant frame shrunk and shook under the force of his emotion. Martin Cole was the last of his lifelong friends.

"This — this outlaw — you say you ran him down?" asked Naab, rising haggard and shaken out of his grief.

"Yes. I took him by surprise. He didn't recognize me, or know what was coming, till Silvermane was on him. But he was quick of wits, and fell sidewise. Silvermane's knee sent him sprawling."

"What will it all lead to?" asked August Naab, and, in his extremity, he appealed to his eldest son.

"The bars are down," said Snap Naab, with a click of his long teeth.

"Father," began Dave Naab earnestly, "Jack has done a splendid thing. The news will fly over Utah like wildfire. Mormons are slow. They need a leader. But they can follow swiftly. We can't cure these evils by hoping and praying. We've got to fight!"

"Dave's right, dad; it means fight," cried George, with his clinched fist high.

"You've been wrong, father, in holding back," said Zeke Naab, his lean jaw bulging. "This Holderness will steal the water and meat out of our children's mouths. We've got to fight!"

"Let's ride to White Sage," put in Snap Naab, with the little flecks in his eyes dancing. "I'll throw a gun on Dene. I can get to him. We've been tolerable friends. He's wanted me to join his band. I'll kill him."

He laughed as he raised his right hand and swept it down to his left side, and the blue Colt lay on his outstretched palm. Dene's life and Holderness' hung in the balance between two deadly snaps of this desert hawk's teeth. He was of the Naabs, but apart from them, for neither religion nor restraint nor friendship nor life mattered to him.

August Naab's huge bulk shook again, not this time with grief, but in wrestling effort to throw off the fiery influence of this fighting spirit of his sons.

"I am forbidden."

His answer was gentle, and from its very gentleness breathed of his battle over himself, of allegiance to something beyond earthly duty. "We'll drive the cattle to Silver Cup, and then go home. I give up Seeping Springs. Perhaps this valley and water will content Holderness."

What was Hare's surprise to learn, upon arriving at the oasis, that it was the day before Christmas. The welcome accorded the long-absent riders was noisy and warm, and in the nature of a celebration. The women relieved the strain of continued anxiety in greetings that were merry and tearful by turns. Much to Hare's disappointment, Mescal did not appear; and, glad as he was to see the children and the happiness of those once more united, the homecoming was not joyful to him, because it lacked her welcoming smile.

Christmas Day ushered in the short desert winter; ice formed in the ditches, and snow fell; but neither long resisted the reflection of the sun from the walls, and the bitter winds were excluded. The early morning hours were devoted to religious services. At mid-

day, the dinner was served in the big room of August Naab's cabin. At one end was a great stone fireplace, where logs blazed and crackled.

In all his days, Hare had never seen such a bountiful board. Yet he was unable to appreciate it, to share in the general thanksgiving. Dominating all other feeling was the fear that Mescal would come in and take a seat by Snap Naab's side. Hare had not seen her since his return; he did not know whether she was well or not; or anything about her.

When Snap seated himself opposite with his pale little wife, Hare found himself waiting for Mescal with an intensity that made him dead to all else. There was a seat vacant on Snap's left. Was it reserved for her? The girls, Judith, Esther, Rebecca, came running gayly in, clad in their best dresses, with bright ribbons to honor the occasion. Rebecca took the seat beside Snap, and Hare gulped with a hard contraction of his throat.

Mescal was not yet a Mormon's wife! He seemed to be lifted upward, to grow light-headed with the knowledge. Then Mescal entered, and took the seat next to him. She smiled and spoke, and the blood beat thick in his ears.

That moment was happy, but it was as nothing to its successor. Under the table cover, Mescal's hand found his, pressed it with a daring, glad, little squeeze. Her hand lingered in his all the time August Naab spent in carving the turkey, lingered there, even though Snap Naab's hawk eyes were on her and Hare in speculation, lingered even a fleeting instant after she had been served with her portion of food.

In the warm touch of her hand, in this little action of boldness, in some subtle thing that radiated from her, Hare sensed a change in the girl he loved. The few months had wrought in her some indefinable

difference, even as they had increased his love to its full volume and depth. Had his absence brought her to a realization of a woman's heart? Had she fought and lost the battle? How strange in her was the sweet, hidden handclasp!

Snap Naab's eyes stilled the tumult within his breast, and, with an effort, he put his attention on the dinner, and strove to add somewhat to its gayety. When it ended, he felt relieved.

In the afternoon, he left the house, and spent a little while with Silvermane, then wandered along the wall to the head of the oasis, and found a seat on the fence. He was face to face with a situation that was entralling, yet almost unendurable. The next few weeks, he would be near Mescal, but only to have the truth forced cruelly home to him every sane moment — that she was not for him. Out on the ranges he had abandoned himself to dreams of her; they had been beautiful; they had made the long hours like minutes; but they had forged chains that could not be broken, and now he was hopelessly, irretrievably, fettered.

The clatter of hoofs roused him from a reverie that was half sad, half sweet. Mescal came tearing down the level on Black Bolly. She pulled in the mustang, and halted beside Hare, to hold out, shyly, a red scarf, embroidered with Navajo symbols, in white and red beads.

"I've wanted a chance to give you this," she said — "a little Christmas present."

For a few seconds, Hare could find no words.

"Did you make it for me, Mescal?" he finally asked. "How good of you! I'll keep it always."

"Put it on now — let me tie it — there!"

"But, child — I ought not. Suppose he — they saw it?"

"I don't care who sees it."

How level the clear, dark glance that met his! What meaning in the curt, crisp speech! He looked long at her, with yearning denied for many a day. Her face was the same, yet wonderfully changed; the same in line and color of beauty, different in soul and spirit. The old, haunting, sombre shadow lay deep in the eyes, and to it had been added gleam of will and reflection of thought. Round the soft curve of lips hid strength. The whole face had undergone a refining, transforming process.

"Mescal! What has happened? You're not the same. You seem almost happy. Have you — has he — given you up?"

"Don't you know Mormons better than that? The thing is the same — as far as they are concerned. Father Naab expects me to marry Snap soon, as soon as Snap can persuade his wife."

"But Mescal — *are* you going to marry him?"

"Never." It was a woman's word, instant, inflexible, desperate. With a deep breath, Hare realized where the girl had changed.

"Still, you're promised, pledged to him! How will you get out of it?"

"That has driven me wild. I don't know how. But I'll cut out my tongue, and be dumb as my poor peon, before I'll speak the word that'll make me Snap Naab's wife."

There was a long silence. Mescal smoothed out Bolly's mane, and Hare gazed up at the walls with eyes that did not see them.

Presently, he spoke. "I'm afraid for you. Snap watched us to-day at dinner."

"He's jealous."

"Suppose he sees this scarf?"

Mescal laughed defiantly. It was bewildering for Hare to hear her.

"He'll — Mescal, I may yet come to adorn this place." Hare's laugh echoed Mescal's as he pointed to an inclosure under the wall, where the graves showed bare and rough.

Her warm color fled, but it flooded back, rich, mantling brow and cheek and neck.

"Snap Naab will never kill you," she said impulsively.

"Mescal!"

She swiftly turned her face away as his hand closed on hers.

"Mescal, do you love me?"

The trembling of her fingers and the heaving of her bosom lent his hope conviction. "Mescal, these past months have been years, years of toiling, thinking, changing, but always loving. I'm not the man you knew. I'm wild — I'm starved for a sight of you. I love you! My Mescal, my desert flower!"

She blindly raised her free hand to his shoulder, and swayed toward him. He held her a moment, clasped tight, and then released her.

"I'm quite mad!" he exclaimed, in a passion of self-reproach. "What risk I'm giving you! But I couldn't help it. Look at me — then go. Just once — please — Mescal, just one look — Ah! Now go."

The drama enacted before Hare in the succeeding days was of absorbing interest. He had liberty; there was little work for him to do save to care for Silvermane. He tried hunting for foxes in the caves and clefts; he rode up and down the broad space under the walls; he sought the open desert, to be driven in by bitter, biting winds. Whatever he undertook, it was only to leave it and return to the big living room of the Naabs, and sit before the burning logs. This spacious room was warm, light, pleasant, and was used by every one in leisure hours.

Mescal spent most of her time there. She was engaged upon a new frock of buckskin, and over this she bent with her needle and beads. When opportunity afforded, Hare conversed with her, speaking one language with his tongue, a far different one with his eyes. When she was not present, he looked into glowing red fire, and dreamed of her.

In the evenings, when Snap Naab came in to his wooing, and drew Mescal into a corner, Hare watched with covert glance and smoldering jealousy. Somehow, he had come to see all things and people through desert vision, and his symbol for Snap Naab was the desert hawk.

Snap's eyes were as wild and piercing as those of a hawk; his nose and mouth were as the beak of a hawk; his hands resembled the claws of a hawk; and the spurs he wore, always bloody, were still more significant. Then, Snap's courting of the girl, the cool assurance, the unhastening ease, were like the slow rise, the sail, and the poise of a desert hawk before his downward, lightning-swift swoop on his quarry.

It was intolerable for Hare to sit there in the evenings, to try to play with the children who loved him, to talk to August Naab, when his eye seemed ever drawn magnetically to the quiet couple in the corner, and his ear strained to catch a word.

That hour was a miserable one for him, yet he could not bring himself to leave the room. He never saw Snap touch her; he never heard Mescal's voice; he believed she spoke very little. When the hour was over, and Mescal rose to pass to her room, then his doubt, his fear, his misery, were as if they had never been, for as Mescal said good night, she gave him one look, swift as a flash, and in it were womanliness and purity, and something beyond his comprehension.

Her Indian serenity and mysticism veiled, yet

suggested, some secret, some power by which she might escape the iron hand of this Mormon rule. Hare could not fathom it. In that good-night glance was a meaning for him alone, if meaning ever shone in woman's eyes, and it said:

"I will be true to you and to myself!"

Meanwhile, Snap had changed greatly. His hawk's eyes were softer than Hare had ever seen them; he was obliging, kind, gay, an altogether different Snap Naab. He shaved his face often, and wore clean scarfs, and left off his bloody spurs. For eight months he had not touched the bottle. When spring approached, he was madly in love with Mescal. And the marriage was delayed because his wife would not have another woman in her home.

Once, Hare heard Snap remonstrating with his father.

"If she don't come to time soon, I'll keep the kids, and send her back to her father."

"Don't be hasty, son. Let her have time," replied August. "Women must be humored. I'll wager she'll give in before the cottonwood blows, and that's not long."

It was Hare's habit, as the days grew warmer, to walk a good deal; and, one evening, as twilight shadowed the oasis and grew black under the towering walls, he strolled out toward the fields.

While passing Snap's cottage in its grove of cottonwoods, Hare heard a woman's voice in passionate protest and a man's in strident anger. Later, as he stood with his arm on Silvermane, a woman's scream, shrieking at first, suddenly faint and smothered, caused him to grow rigid, and his hand clenched tight. When he went back by the cottage, a low moaning confirmed his suspicion.

That evening, Snap appeared unusually bright and

happy; and he asked his father to name the day for the wedding. August did so in a loud voice, and with glad relief. Then the quaint Mormon congratulations were tendered to Mescal.

To Hare, watching the strange girl with the distressingly keen intuition of an importunate lover, she appeared as glad as any of them that the marriage was settled. But there was no shyness, no blushing confusion. When Snap bent to kiss her, for what must have been his first kiss, she slightly turned her face, so that his lips brushed her cheek, yet even then her reserve did not break for an instant.

Hare had his task in pretending to congratulate her; nevertheless, he mumbled something. She lifted her long lashes, and there, deep beneath the shadows, was unutterable anguish. It gave him a shock. He went to his room, convinced that she had yielded, and, though he could not blame her, knew she was helpless, he cried out in reproach and resentment. She had failed him, as he had known she must fail. It was as if he had all his soul to suffer again. He tossed on his bed and thought; he lay quiet, wide-open eyes staring into the darkness, and his mind burned and seethed. Through the hours of that long night, he learned what love had cost him.

With the morning light came calmness and resignation. Several days slowly went by, bringing the first of April, which was to be the wedding day. August Naab had said it would come before the cottonwoods shed their white floss; and their buds had just commenced to open. The day was not a holiday, and George and Zeke and Dave began to pack for the ranges, yet it wore the air of jollity and festivity.

Snap Naab had a springy step, a jaunty mien. Once he regarded Hare with a slow smile. Piute prepared to drive his new flock up on the plateau. The women of

the household were busy and excited; the children romped.

The afternoon waned into twilight, and Hare sought the quiet shadows under the wall, near the river trail. He meant to stay there until August Naab had pronounced his son and Mescal man and wife. The dull roar of the rapids boomed on a faint puff of westerly breeze, and lulled in soothing murmur. A radiant white star peeped over the black rim of the wall. The solitude and silence were speaking to Hare's heart, easing his pain, when a soft patter of moccasined feet raised him bolt upright.

A slender, dark form rounded the corner wall. It was Mescal. The white dog, Wolf, hung close by her side. Swiftly, she reached Hare.

"Mescal!" he exclaimed.

"Hush! Speak softly," she whispered fearfully. Then her hands were clinging to his.

"Jack, do you love me still?"

More than woman's sweetness in the whisper was the thrill, the portent of indefinable motive that made Hare tremble like a shaking leaf.

"Good heavens! You were to be married in a few minutes — what do you mean? Where are you going? This buckskin suit — and Wolf with you — Mescal!"

"There's no time — only a word — hurry — do you love me still?" she panted, with great, shining eyes close to his.

"Love you? With all my soul!"

"Listen," she whispered, and leaned against him. "I never said it — I couldn't say it — I wasn't free — but now I am."

A fresh breeze bore the boom of the river. She caught her breath quickly: "Now I can say it — I love you! — I love you! Good-by!"

She kissed him, and broke from his clasp. Then,

silently, like a shadow, with the white dog close beside her, she disappeared in the darkness of the river trail.

She was gone before he came out of his bewilderment. He rushed down the trail; he called her name. The gloom had swallowed her, and only the echo of his voice made answer.

XII

ECHO CLIFFS

When a thought leaped clear of the jumble in Hare's mind, he halted, irresolute. For her own sake, he must not appear to have had any part in Mescal's headlong flight, or any knowledge of it.

With stealthy footsteps, he traversed the distance to the cottonwoods, stole under the gloomy shade, felt his way to a point beyond the twinkling light; then, peering through the gloom until assured he was safe from observation, and taking the dark side of the house, he gained the hall, and his room.

All in a fever and a cold sweat, he threw himself on his bed, and endeavored to compose himself, to quiet his vibrating nerves, to still the triumphant bellbeat of his heart. For a while, all his being swung to the palpitating, mounting consciousness of joy — Mescal had taken her freedom. She had evaded the swoop of the hawk.

While Hare lay there, trying to gather his shattered force, the merry sound of voices and the music of an accordion hummed from the big living room next to his. Presently, heavy boots thumped on the floor of the hall; then a hand rapped on his door.

"Jack, are you there?" called August Naab.

"Yes."

"Come along, then."

Hare rose, opened the door, and followed August. The big room was bright with lights; the table was

set; and the Naabs, large and small, were standing expectantly. As Hare found a place behind them, Snap Naab entered, with his wife. She was pale, as if she were in her shroud. Hare caught Mother Ruth's pitying, subdued glance, as she drew the frail little woman to her side. When August Naab began fingering his Bible, the whispering ceased.

"Why don't they fetch her in?" he questioned.

"Judith, Esther, bring her in," called Mother Mary.

Quick footsteps skipped up the hall, and the girls burst in, impetuously exclaiming: "Mescal's not there!"

"Where is she, then?" demanded August Naab, going to the door. "*Mescal!*"

Succeeding his authoritative call, only a cheery sputter of the wood fire broke the silence.

"She hadn't put on her white frock," went on Judith.

"Her buckskins aren't hanging where they always are," continued Esther.

August Naab laid his Bible on the table, "I always feared it," he said simply.

"She's gone!" cried Snap Naab. He ran into the hall, into Mescal's room, and returned, trailing the white wedding dress. "The time we thought she spent to put this on, she's been —"

He choked over the words, and sank into a chair, face convulsed, hands shaking, weak in the grip of grief he had never before known. Suddenly, he flung the dress into the fire. His wife fell to the floor in a dead faint.

Then the desert hawk showed his claws. His hands tore at the close scarf round his throat, as if to liberate a fury that was stifling him; his face lost all semblance to anything human. He began to howl, to rave, to curse, when his father circled him with iron arm, and dragged him from the room.

The children were whimpering, the wives lamenting. The quiet men searched the house and yard and corrals and fields. But they found no sign of Mescal. After long hours, the excitement subsided, and all sought their beds.

Morning disclosed the facts of Mescal's flight. She had dressed for the trail; a knapsack was missing, and food enough to fill it; Wolf was gone; Noddle was not in his corral; the peon slave had not slept in his shack; there were moccasin tracks and burro tracks and dog tracks in the sand at the river crossing, and one of the boats was gone. This boat was not moored to the opposite shore.

Questions arose. Had the boat sunk? Had the fugitives crossed, or drifted into the cañon?

Dave Naab rode out along the river, and saw the boat, a mile below the rapids, bottom side up, and lodged on a sandbar.

"She got across, then set the boat loose," said August. "That's the Indian of her. If she went up on the cliffs to the Navajos, maybe we'll find her. If she went into the Painted Desert —" A grave shake of his shaggy head completed his sentence.

Morning also disclosed Snap Naab once more in the clutch of his demon, drunk, unconscious, lying like a log on the porch of his cottage.

"This means ruin to him," said his father. "He had one chance; he was mad over Mescal, and, if he had got her, might have conquered his thirst for rum."

He gave orders for the sheep to be driven up on the plateau, and for his sons to ride out to the cattle range; and bade Hare to pack and get in readiness to accompany him to the Navajo cliffs, there to search for Mescal.

The river was low, as the spring thaws had not yet set in, and the crossing promised none of the hazard

so menacing at a later period. Billy Naab rowed across, with the saddle and packs. August had to crowd the lazy burros into the water. Silvermane went in, as he did everything, with a rush, and Charger took to the river like an old duck. August and Jack sat in the stern of the boat, while Billy handled the oars.

They crossed swiftly and safely. The three burros were then loaded, two with packs, the other with a heavy water bag.

"See there," said August, pointing to tracks in the sand. The imprints of little moccasins reassured Hare, for he had feared a possibility suggested by the upturned boat. "Perhaps it'll be better if I never find her," continued Naab. "If I bring her back, Snap's as likely to kill her as marry her. But I must try to find her. Only, what to do with her —"

"Give her to me," interrupted Jack.

"Hare!"

"I love her."

Naab's stern face relaxed. "Well, I'm beat! Though I don't see why you should be different from all the others. It was that time you spent with her on the plateau. I thought you too sick to think of a woman!"

"Mescal cares for me," said Hare.

"Ah! That accounts. Hare, did she, did you, play me fair?"

"We tried to, though we couldn't help loving."

"She would have married Snap but for you."

"Yes. But I couldn't help that. You brought me out here, and saved my life. I know what I owe you; Mescal meant to marry your son when I left for the range last fall. I renounced every hope, except to think of her, to love her. But she's a true woman, and could not marry him. August Naab, if we ever find her, can you marry her to him — now?"

"That depends. Did you know she intended to run?"

"I never dreamed of it. I learned it at the last moment. I met her on the river trail."

"You should have stopped her."

Hare maintained silence.

"You should have told me," went on Naab.

"I couldn't. I'm only human."

"Well, well, I'm not blaming you, Hare. I had hot blood once. But I'm afraid the desert will not be large enough for you and Snap. She's pledged to him. You can't change the Mormon church. For the sake of peace, I'd give you Mescal, if I could. Snap will either have her, or kill her. I'm going to hunt this desert in advance of him, because he'll trail her like a hound. It would be better to marry her to him than to see her dead."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"Hare, your nose is on a blood scent, like a wolf's. I can see — I've always seen. Well, remember, I'm Snap's father and your friend. It's man to man between you now."

All the while during this talk, they were winding under the bluff of Echo Cliffs, gradually climbing, and working up to a level with the desert, which they presently attained at a point near the head of the cañon. The trail swerved to the left, following the base of the cliffs.

The tracks of Noddle and Wolf were plainly visible in the dust. Hare felt that, if they ever led out into the immense, airy-colored space of the desert, all hope of finding Mescal must be abandoned. This was his first ride on the Painted Desert side of the cañon; and now the strange call of something evermore about to be came on the whips of dusty wind, and the rustling, silken streams of sand.

They trailed the tracks of the dog and burro to Bitter Seeps — a shallow oozing spring of alkali — and

there lost all trace of them. The path up the cliffs to the Navajo ranges was bare, time-worn in solid rock, and showed only the imprint of age. Desert-ward, the ridges of shale, the washes of copper earth, baked in the sun, gave no sign of the fugitives' course.

August Naab shrugged his broad shoulders and pointed his horse to the cliff. It was dusk when they surmounted it. The fragrance of juniper and cedar and white sage, striking Hare full as he gained the top, vividly recalled the plateau, the memorable days with Mescal, tending the sheep, watching the sun set, listening to the wind in the cedars.

They camped in the lee of an uplifting crag. When the wind died down, the night was no longer unpleasantly cool, and Hare finding August Naab uncommunicative and sleepy, strolled along the rim of the cliff, as he had been wont to do in the sheep herding days.

He could scarcely disassociate them from the present, for the bitter-sweet smell of tree and bush, the almost inaudible sigh of breeze, the opening and shutting of the great white stars in the blue dome, the silence, the sense of the invisible void beneath him — all were the same creative, thought-provoking parts of that past of which nothing could ever be forgotten.

The preceding weeks of enforced idleness, wherein his reflection had centered round Mescal, had left scarce opportunity for his lonesome habit of watching and listening, formed on plateau and ranges, but now it reasserted itself, his glance seemed to pierce the gloom and rend the desert shadows, and his ear filled with the silence.

But it was silence that rewarded a trained sensitive ear. It broke to far distant and faint sounds, to the weathering of the cliff, to mourning wolf or moan of wind in a splintered crag.

Then he heard a cry. Weird and low, it wailed up from the desert, winding along the hollow trail, freeing itself in the wide air, and dying away.

He had often heard the scream of lion and squall of wild cat, and barks and yells of other desert beasts, but this sound was one of the strange cries August Naab had told him he would hear, one of the inexplicable cries of the cañon and desert night.

Many lonely vigils had he kept on the ranges, and on some of them, when his ear was like his mood, listening, sentinel-like for wild cries within and without, he had been frozen by a sound that had no name, by something that spoke to his spirit. In the light of day, when he remembered, he had thought it imagination.

He also saw visions in the purple distances of the desert. What of the Ghost Mountains, deep blue at dawn, lilac in the glare of light, red at sunset? Yet, the mountains were not really there. At night, from the rim of one of these lofty walls of the desert, the depths were a black, moving, marshaling world of shifting shadows and spectres. But it was only space wrapped in darkness. He heard mocking echoes in the cañons; singing and sighing in the cedars; voices in the night, lifting on the wind.

And that which had moved him wafted up again, so low, so unreal, that it seemed a cry in a dream, the something evermore about to be had spoken. Or was it Mescal, lost in the desert, calling him with her spirit? Or was it both?

Baffled by this fugitive cry, which he strained to hear again, and failed, he shook himself impatiently and turned for camp, striving to assert once more his practical, unemotional self. But no ready laugh came; another epoch in his desert regeneration had closed; there was a communion between him and the silence

and the night; he could not live under the open stars, in the face of the wind, on the heights, among the solitudes, and not feel the things he could not know.

Daylight revealed Echo Cliffs to be of vastly greater range than the sister plateau across the river. The roll of cedar level, the heave of craggy ridge, the dip of White Sage Valley gave this side a diversity widely differing from the two steps of the Vermilion table-land.

August Naab followed a trail leading back toward the river. For the most part, thick cedars hid the surroundings from Hare's view; occasionally, however, he had a backward glimpse from a high point, or a wide prospect below, where the trail overlooked an oval hemmed-in valley.

About midday August Naab brushed through a thicket, and came abruptly on a declivity. He turned to his companion with a wave of his hand.

"The Navajo camp," he said. "Eschtah has lived there for I don't know how many years. It's the only permanent Navajo camp I know. These Indians are nomads. Most of them live wherever the sheep lead them. This plateau ranges for a hundred miles, farther than any white man knows, and everywhere, in the valleys and green nooks, will be found Navajo hogans. That's why we may never find Mescal."

Hare's gaze traveled down over the tips of cedar and crag to a pleasant vale, dotted with round, mound-like white-streaked hogans, from which lazy, floating columns of blue smoke curled upward. Mustangs and burros and sheep browsed on the white patches of grass. Bright red blankets blazed on the cedar branches. There was slow, colorful movement of Indians, passing in and out of their homes. The scene brought irresistibly to Hare the thought of summer, of long, warm afternoons, of leisure that took no stock of time.

On the way down the trail, they encountered a flock of sheep driven by a little Navajo boy on a brown burro. It was difficult to tell which was the more surprised, the hairy, huge-eared burro, that stood stock-still, or the boy, who first kicked and pounded his shaggy steed, and then jumped off and ran, with black locks flying. Farther down Indian girls started up from tasks and darted silently into the shade of the cedars.

August Naab whooped when he reached the valley, and Indian braves appeared, to cluster round him, shake his hand and Hare's, and lead them toward the centre of the encampment.

The hogans where these desert savages dwelt were all alike; only the chief's was larger. From without, it resembled a mound of clay with a few white logs, half imbedded, shining against the brick red. August Naab drew aside a blanket hanging over a door and entered, beckoning his companion to follow.

Inured as Hare had become to wood smoke, for a moment he could not see, or scarcely breathe, so thick was the atmosphere. A fire, the size of which attested to the desert Indian's love of warmth, blazed in the middle of the hogan, and sent much of its smoke upward through a round hole in the roof.

Eschtah, with blanket over his shoulder, lean, black head bent, sat near the fire, with the many members of his family at various occupations near him. He noted the entrance of his visitors, but immediately resumed his meditative posture, and appeared not to be aware of their presence.

Hare imitated August's example, sitting down and speaking no word. His eyes, however, roved discreetly to and fro. Eschtah's three wives presented great differences in age and appearance. The eldest was a toothless, wrinkled, parchment-skinned old hag who

sat sightless before the fire; the next was a solid, square squaw, who engaged herself in the task of combing a naked little boy's hair with a comb made of stiff thin roots tied tightly in a round bunch. If the youngster's actions and grimaces were matter to judge from this combing process was not pleasant.

The third wife, much younger, had a comely face, and long braids of black hair, of which, evidently, she was proud. She leaned on her knees over a flat slab of rock, and, holding in her hands a long, oval stone, she rolled and mashed corn into a maize.

There were young braves, handsome in a bronze-skinned way, bands binding their straight thick hair, silver rings in their ears, silver bracelets on their wrists, silver buttons on their moccasins.

There were girls who looked up from their blanket weaving with shy curiosity, and then turned to their frames strung with long threads, and nimble fingers slipped the wool-carrying needles in and out, making the colored stripes grow. One of these Navajo girls had the same dark, level brows, hair, and brown skin as Mescal, and resembled her, too, though she was not so small and sleek of head, nor so slender and graceful of form. Then there were younger boys and girls, all bright-eyed and curious, and babies sleeping on blankets.

Where the walls and ceiling were not covered with feathered bonnets, beaded buckskin garments, weapons and blankets, Hare saw the white wood ribs of the hogan structure. It was a work of art, this circular, clean house of forked logs and branches, interwoven into a dome, arched and strong, and all covered outside and cemented with clay.

At a touch of August's hand, Hare fixed his attention on the old chief, and awaited his speech. It came with the uplifting of Eschtah's head, and the offering

of his hand in the white man's salute. August's replies were slow and labored; he could not speak the Navajo tongue fluently, but he understood it very well, and therefore his translation to Hare was free and literal.

"The White Prophet is welcome," was the chief's greeting. "Does he come for sheep or braves or to honor the Navajo in his home?"

"Eschtah, he seeks the Flower of the Desert," replied August Naab. "Mescal has left him. Her trail leads to the bitter waters under the cliff, and then is as a bird's."

"The desert eagle's fledgling has flown to the free crags. Eschtah is old and wise; he knows; he has waited, yet Mescal has not come to him."

"She has not been here?"

"Mescal's shadow has not gladdened the Navajo's door."

"She has climbed the crags or wandered into the cañons. The White Father loves her; he must find her."

"Eschtah's braves and mustangs are for his friend's use. Eschtah's friendship is not light; his word will find Mescal, if she is not as the perfume of the flower of her name, blown far on the winds. The Navajo will find her, if she is not as the grain of drifting sand. But is the White Prophet wise in his years? Eschtah has seen the summers of three warriors, his word is wisdom. Let the Flower of the Desert take root in the soil of her forefathers."

"Eschtah's wisdom is great, but he thinks only of Indian blood. Mescal is half white, and her ways have been the ways of the white man. Nor does Eschtah think of the white man's love."

"The desert has called. Where is the White Prophet's vision? White blood and red blood will not mix. The Indian's blood pales in the white man's stream, or it

burns red for the sun and the waste and the wild. Eschtah's forefathers, sleeping here in the silence, have called the Desert Flower."

"It is true. But the white man is bound; he cannot be as the Indian; he does not content himself with life as it is; he hopes and prays for change; he believes in the progress of his race on earth. Therefore, Eschtah's white friend seeks Mescal; he has brought her up as his own; he wants to take her home, to love her better, to trust to the future."

"The white man's ways are white man's ways. Eschtah respects them. He speaks out of his years. He remembers that it was here his daughter gave birth to this white woman-child. Eschtah remembers. He closed her dead eyes and sent word to his white friend. He named this child for the flower that rises slender and straight, and blows in the wind of silent places; he named her for the wine of this flower that is sweet to the Indian and thickens his blood. Eschtah gave his grand-daughter to his friend. She has been the bond between them. Now she is flown, and the White Father seeks the Navajo. Let him command. Eschtah has spoken."

Eschtah pressed into Naab's service a band of young braves, under the guidance of several warriors who knew every trail of the range, every water hole, every cranny where even a wolf might hide.

They rimmed the river end of the plateau, and, working westward, scoured the levels, ridges, valleys, and climbed to the peaks, and sent their Indian dogs into the thickets and caves. From Eschtah's encampment westward the hogans diminished in number till only one here and there was discovered, hidden under a yellow wall, or amid a clump of cedars.

All the Indians whom they met were sternly questioned by the chiefs, and their dwellings were searched

and the ground about their water holes closely examined. Mile on mile the plateau was covered by these Indians, who beat the brush and penetrated the fastnesses with hunting instinct that left scarcely a rabbit burrow unrevealed.

The days sped by; the circle of the sun arched higher; the patches of snow in high places disappeared, and the search proceeded westward. They camped where the night overtook them, sometimes near water and grass, sometimes in bare, dry places. To the westward the plateau widened, heaved in more rugged ridges, and its seared crags split the sky like sharp saw-teeth. And after many miles of wild up-ranging, it reached a divide which marked the line of Eschtah's domain.

Naab's dogged persistence, and the Navajo's faithfulness carried them into the country of the Moki Indians, a tribe classed as slaves by the proud race of Eschtah. Here they searched the villages and ancient tombs and ruins, but of Mescal there was never a trace.

Hare rode as diligently and searched as indefatigably as August, but he never had any real hope of finding the girl. To hunt for her, however, despite its hopelessness, was a melancholy sort of happiness, for seldom was she out of his mind.

Nor was the month's hard riding with the Navajos without profit. He made friends with the Indians, and learned to speak many of their words.

The whole outward life of the Indian was concerned with physical things — dust, rock, air, wind, smoke, and the mustangs, the cedars, the beasts of the desert. These things made up the Indians' day. The Navajos were worshipers of the physical; the sun was their supreme god. In the mornings, when the gray of dawn flushed to rosy red they began their chant to the sun. To Hare this song was beautiful. It was indescribably wild, sad, strange, and remindful of the differing be-

iefs of life. At sunset the Navajos were watchful and silent, with faces westward.

The Moki Indians also, Hare observed, had their morning service to the great giver of light. In the gloom of early dawn, before the pink appeared in the east, and all was whitening gray, the Mokis emerged from their little mud and stone huts and sat upon the roofs with blanketed and drooping heads.

One day August Naab showed in few words how significant the sun was in the lives of desert men.

"We've got to turn back," he said to Hare. "The sun is getting hot, and the snow will melt in the mountains. If the Colorado rises too high, we can't cross."

They were two days in riding back to the encampment. Eschtah received them in dignified silence, expressive of his regret. When their time of departure arrived, he accompanied them to the head of the nearest trail, which started down from Saweep Peak, the highest point of Echo Cliffs. It was the Navajo's outlook over the Painted Desert.

"Mescal is there," said August Naab. "She is there with the slave Eschtah gave her. He leads Mescal. Who can follow him there?"

The old chieftain reined beside the time-hollowed trail, and the hand that waved his white friend downward swept up in a long, slow, stately gesture toward the illimitable expanse. It was a warrior's salute to an unconquered world. Hare saw in his falcon eyes the still gleam, the brooding fire, the mystical passion that haunted Mescal's.

"The slave without a tongue is a wolf. He scents the trails and the waters. Eschtah's eyes have grown old watching here, but he has seen no Indian who could follow Mescal's slave. Look! There is the Navajo's grave! Eschtah will die there, but no Indian will

know the trail to the place of his sleep. Can the White Prophet see? Does he know why the Ghost Mountains follow the Indian when he goes, and retreat when he comes? Let him know, then. Mescal's trail is lost in the sand. No man may find it. Eschtah's words are wisdom. He loves his friend. Look!"

To search for any living creatures in that borderless domain of colored dune, of shifting cloud of sand, of purple curtain shrouding mesa and dome seemed the vainest of all human endeavors. It was as if it were a waning, shimmering, rainbow realm of the sun.

At first only the beauty stirred Hare. He saw the copper belt close under the cliffs, the white beds of alkali and washes of silt farther out, the wind-plowed cañons and dust-encumbered ridges ranging west and east, the strange, scalloped slopes of the long, flat tableland rising low, the black tips of volcanic peaks leading the eye beyond to veils and vapors hovering over indistinct blue clefts and dim, dark line of level lanes, and so on, out to the unreal vast unknown of deceiving light.

Then Hare grasped a little of its meaning. What a sun-painted, sun-governed world! What white blinding lustre! What storm scars of ages! Here was deep and majestic nature in its principle of eternal change. But it was only through Eschtah's eyes that he saw its parched, lifeless slopes, its terrifying desolateness, its still, silent sleeping death, its decay.

When the old chieftain's lips opened, Hare anticipated the austere speech, the import that meant only pain to him, and his whole inner being seemed to shrink.

"The White Prophet's child of red blood is lost to him," said Eschtah. "The Flower of the Desert is as a grain of drifting sand."

XIII

THE SOMBRE LINE

August Naab expressed a hope that Mescal might have returned home during his absence; but it was a cheerless one which Hare could not delude himself into holding. The women of the oasis met them with gloomy faces, presaging bad news, and they were reluctant to tell it. Mescal's flight had been forgotten in the sterner and sadder misfortune.

Snap Naab's wife lay dangerously ill, the victim of his drunken frenzy. For days after the departure of August and Jack, the man had kept himself in a stupor; then, his store of drink failing, he had come out of his almost senseless state into one that bordered on the maniacal. He had tried to kill his wife and wreck his cottage, being prevented in the nick of time by Dave Naab, the only brother who dared approach him. Then he had ridden off on the White Sage trail, and had not been heard from since.

The Mormon put forth all his skill in surgery and medicine to save the life of his son's wife; though he admitted that he had misgivings as to her recovery. While there was life there was hope, said August Naab. He bade Hare, after he had rested a while, pack and ride out to the range, and tell his sons that he would come later.

Nothing loath to leave the oasis, where inaction caused constant thought of Mescal, Hare departed the same day, and made Silver Cup that night. As he rode

under the low-branching cedars toward the bright camp fire, he looked sharply for Snap Naab. But not one of the four ruddy faces in the glow belonged to Snap.

"Hello, Jack!" called Dave Naab, into the dark. "I knew that was you. Silvermane sure rings bells when he hoofs it down the stones. How're you, and dad, and did you find Mescal? I'll bet that wild Navajo kid led you clear to the Little Colorado."

Hare related the story of the fruitless search.

"It's no more than we expected," said Dave. "The man doesn't live who can trail the peon. Mescal's like a captured wild mustang that's slipped her halter and gone free. She'll die out there on the desert, or dry up into a stalk of the Indian cactus for which she's named. It's a pity, for she was a sweet girl and a good girl, too good for Snap."

"What's your news?" inquired Hare.

"Oh, nothing much," replied Dave, with his short laugh. "The cattle wintered well. There was enough snow fell in the range to make fine browse this spring. We've had little to do but hang round and watch. Zeke and I chased old Whitefoot one day, and got pretty close to Seeping Springs. We met Joe Stube, a rider, who was once a friend of Zeke's. He's with Holderness now, and he said that Holderness had rebuilt the corrals at the spring, also put up a big cabin, and has a dozen riders there. Stube told us Snap had been shooting up White Sage; had had several scrapes. He finished up by killing Snood. They got into an argument about you."

"About me!"

"Yes, it seems that Snood took your part, or something like, and Snap wouldn't stand for it. Too bad! Snood was a good fellow. There's no use talking, Snap's going too far. He is —" Dave did not conclude his

remark, and the failure was more significant than any utterance.

"What will the Mormons in White Sage say about Snap's killing Snood?"

"They've said a lot. This 'even break' business goes all right among gun fighters, but the Mormons call killing 'murder.' They've outlawed Culver, and Snap will be outlawed next."

"Your father hinted that Snap would find the desert too small for him and me?"

"Jack, you can't be too careful. I've wanted to speak to you about it. Snap will ride in here some day, and then —" Dave's silent conclusions were not reassuring.

And it was only on the third day after Dave's remark that Hare, riding down the mountain with a deer he had shot, looked out from the trail and saw Snap's cream pinto trotting toward Silver Cup. Beside Snap rode a tall man on a big bay.

When Hare reached camp, he reported to George and Zeke what he had seen and learned in reply that Dave had already sighted the horsemen, and had gone down to the edge of the cedars.

While they were speaking, Dave ran up the trail.

"It's Snap and Holderness!" he called out sharply. "What's Snap doing with Holderness? What's he bringing him here for?"

"I don't like the looks of it," replied Zeke deliberately.

"Jack, what'll you do?" asked Dave suddenly.

"Do? What can I do? I'm not going to run out of camp because of a visit of men who don't like me."

"It might be wisest."

"Do you ask me to run, to avoid a meeting with your brother?"

"No." The dull red came to Dave's cheek. "But will you draw on him?"

"Certainly not. He's August Naab's son and your brother."

"Yes, and you're my friend, which Snap won't think of. Will you draw on Holderness, then?"

"For the life of me, Dave, I can't tell you," replied Hare, pacing the trail. "Something must break loose in me before I can kill a man. I'd draw, I suppose, in self-defense. But what good would it do me to draw too late? Dave, this thing is what I've feared. I'm not afraid of Snap or Holderness, not that way. Look here, would either of them shoot an unarmed man?"

"I hope not; I don't think so. But you're packing a gun."

Hare unbuckled his cartridge belt, which held his Colt, and hung it over the pommel of his saddle, and then he sat down on one of the stone seats near the camp fire.

"There they come," whispered Zeke, and he rose to his feet, followed by George.

"Steady, you fellows!" said Dave, with a warning glance. "I'll do the talking."

Holderness and Snap appeared among the cedars, and, trotting out into the glade, reined in their mounts a few paces from the fire. Dave Naab stood directly before Hare, and George and Zeke stepped aside.

"Howdy, boys!" called out Holderness, with his genial smile. It was like the gleam of light playing on a cold surface. His amber eyes were as steady as a rock, their gaze contracted into piercing yellow points.

Dave studied the cattleman in cool scorn, and, deigning him no reply, addressed himself to his brother.

"Snap, what do you mean riding in here with this fellow?"

"I'm Holderness' new foreman. We're just looking round," replied Snap. The hard lines, the sullen shade, the hawk-beak cruelty had returned ten-fold to his face, and his glance was like a living, leaping flame.

"New foreman!" exclaimed Dave. His jaw dropped, and he stared in amazement. "No! You can't mean that! You're drunk!"

"That's what I said," growled Snap.

"You're a liar!" shouted Dave, a crimson blot blurring with the brown on his cheeks. He jumped off the ground in his fury.

"It's true, Naab, he's my new foreman," put in Holderness suavely. "A hundred a month — in gold, and I've got a good a place for you."

Dave's arm came down, and he grew still, while his face blanched to his lips. "Holderness!"

"I know what you'd say," interrupted the ranchman. "But stow it all. I know you're game. And what's the use for us to fight? I'm talking business. I'll —"

"You can't talk business or anything else to me," said Dave Naab, and he veered to his brother. "Say it again, Snap Naab. You've hired out to ride for this man?"

"That's it."

"You're going against your father, your brothers, your own flesh and blood?"

"I can't see it that way."

"Then you're a drunken, easily led fool. This man's no rancher. He's a rustler. He ruined Martin Cole, the father of your first wife. He has stolen our cattle; he has usurped our water rights. He seeks to ruin us. For Heaven's sake, where's your manhood?"

"Things have gone bad for me," replied Snap sullenly, shifting in his saddle. "I reckon I'll do better to cut out alone for myself."

"You crooked-faced cur! Thank God you're only my half-brother, after all. I always knew you'd come to something bad, but I never thought you'd disgrace the Naabs and break your father's heart. Now, then, what do you want here? Be quick. This is our range, and you and your boss can't ride here. You can't even water your horses. Out with your errand!"

At this, Hare, who had been hanging on the words, so absorbed as to forget himself, suddenly experienced a cold tightening of the skin of his face, and a hard swell of his breast, as if it were about to burst. The dance of Snap's eyes, the downward flit of his hand seemed instantaneous with a red flash and a loud report.

Instinctively Hare dipped down under the powdery stream, and the light impact of something like a puff of air gave place to a tearing hot agony. Then he slipped down, back to the stone, upright, with a bloody hand fumbling at his breast.

Dave leaped with tigerish agility, and knocking up the leveled Colt, held Snap as in a vise. George Naab gave Holderness' horse a sharp kick which made the mettlesome beast jump so suddenly that his rider was nearly unseated. Zeke ran to Hare and laid him back against the stone.

"Cool down, there!" ordered Zeke. "He's done for."

"No — no!" cried Dave, in a broken voice. "Not — not dead?"

"Shot through the heart!"

Dave Naab flung Snap backward, almost off his horse. "You coward! Run, or not for all heaven will I hold my hand! And you, Holderness! Remember! If we ever meet again — you draw!"

He tore a branch from a cedar and slashed both horses. They plunged out of the glade, and, clattering

over the stones, brushing the cedars, disappeared over the slope.

Dave groped blindly back.

"Zeke, this is awful. Another murder by Snap! And my friend! Who's to tell father?"

Then Hare sat up, leaning against the stone, his shirt open and bare shoulder bloody, his face pale, but his eyes smiling. "Cheer up, Dave. I'm not dead yet."

"Sure he's not," said Zeke. "He ducked none too soon, or too late, and caught the bullet up in the shoulder."

Dave sat down very quietly without a word, and the hand he laid on Hare's knee shook a very little.

"When I saw George go for his gun," went on Zeke. "I knew there'd be a lively time in a minute if it wasn't stopped, so I just said Jack was dead."

"Do you think they came over to get me?" asked Hare.

"No doubt of it in the world," replied Dave, lifting his face and wiping the sweat from his brow. "I knew that at the first, but I was so paralyzed by Snap's treachery in going over to Holderness that I couldn't keep my wits or temper, and I didn't mark Snap edging over from in front of me till too late."

"Listen! I hear horses," said Zeke, looking up from his task over Hare's wound.

"It's Billy, up on the home trail," added George. "Yes, and there's father with him. Must we tell him about Snap?"

"Some one must tell him," answered Dave.

"That'll be you, then. You always do the talking."

August Naab galloped into the glade, and swung himself out of the saddle. "I heard a shot. What's this? Who's hurt? Hare! Why — lad — how is it with you?"

"Not bad," rejoined Hare.

"Let me see," August summarily thrust aside Zeke. "A bullet hole — just missed the bone — not serious. Tie it up tight. I'll take him home to-morrow. Hare, who's been here?"

"Snap rode in and left his respects."

"Snap! Already? Yet I knew it — I saw it. You had Providence with you, lad, for this wound is not bad. Snap surprised you, then?"

"No. I knew it was coming."

"Jack hung his belt and gun on Silvermane's saddle," explained Dave. "He didn't feel as if he could draw on either Snap or Holderness —"

"Holderness!"

"Yes. Snap rode in with Holderness. Hare thought if he was unarmed they wouldn't draw. But Snap did."

"Was he drunk?"

"No. They came over to kill Hare. And — see here, dad — that's not all. Snap's gone to the bad."

Dave Naab shadowed his face while he told of his brother's perfidy; the others turned away, and Hare closed his eyes.

For long moments there was silence, broken only by the tramp of the old man as he strode heavily to and fro, up and down. At last the footsteps ceased and Hare opened his eyes to see Naab's tall form erect, arms uplifted, great shaggy head rigid. He resembled a statue of wrath and denunciation.

"Hare," began August presently. "I am responsible for this cowardly attack on you. I brought you out here. This is the second one. Beware of the third! I see — but tell me, do you remember that I said you must meet Snap as man to man?"

"Yes."

"Don't you want to live?"

"Of course."

"You have no Mormon creed?"

"Why, no," Hare replied wonderingly.

"What was the reason I taught you my trick with a gun?"

"I suppose it was to help me to defend myself."

"Then why do you let yourself be shot down in cold blood? Why did you hang up your gun? Why didn't you draw on Snap? Was it because of his father, his brothers, his family?"

"Partly, not altogether," replied Hare slowly. "I didn't know before what I know now. My flesh sickened at the thought of killing a man, even to save my own life, and to kill — your son —"

"No son of mine!" thundered Naab. Sternly, stoically he had cast out love of his firstborn. "Remember that, when next you meet. I want not your blood on my hands. Don't stand to be killed like a sheep! If you have felt any duty to me, I release you."

Zeke finished bandaging the wound, and laying a bed of blankets near Hare lifted him into it, and covered him, cautioning him to lie still.

Hare had a sensation of extreme lassitude, a deep drowsiness that permeated him, even to his bones. There were intervals of oblivion, then a long blank, succeeded by a time when the stars blinked in his eyes. He heard the wind, Silvermane's bell, the murmur of voices, yet all seemed remote from him, intangible as things in a dream.

He rode home next day, sagging in his saddle and fainting at the end of the trail, with the strong arm of August Naab upholding him. Then his wound was dressed, and he was put to bed, where he lay sleeping most of the time, brooding the rest.

In three weeks he was in the saddle again, riding out over the red strip of desert toward the range.

During his convalescence he had learned that he had come to the sombre line of choice. Either he must deliberately back away, thereby signaling his unfitness to survive in the desert, or he must step across into its dark wildness with deadly intent. The stern question still abided with him. Yet he felt it to be a question waiting only for the moment.

He sought lonely rides more than ever, and like Silvermane, he was always watching and listening. His duties carried him half way to Seeping Springs across the valley to the red wall, up the slope of Coconina far into the forest of stately pines. What, with Silverman's wonderful scent and sight, and his own constant watchfulness, there were never range riders or wild horses or even deer near him without his knowledge.

The days flew by; spring had long given place to summer; the hot blaze of sun and blast of flying sand were succeeded by cooling breezes from the mountain; October brought the flurries of snow, and November the dark storm clouds.

Hare was the last of the riders to be driven off the mountain. The brothers were waiting for him at Silver Cup, and at once packed and started for home.

August Naab listened to the details of the range riding since his absence, with a surprise he did not speak. Holderness and Snap had steered clear of Silver Cup after the supposed killing of Hare. Occasionally a group of riders rode across the valley or up a trail within sight of Dave and his followers, yet there was never a meeting. Not a steer had been driven off the range that summer and fall, and, except for the menace always hanging in the blue smoke over Seeping Springs, the range riding had passed as it used to pass before the coming of rustlers.

So for Hare the months had gone by swiftly,

though they seemed years in the looking backward. The winter at the oasis he filled as best he could with the children playing in the yard, with Silvermane under the sunny lee of the great red wall, with any work that offered itself.

It was during the long evening, when he could not be active, that time oppressed him, and the past grew near. A glimpse of the red sunset through the cliff gate toward the west started the train of thought, and he loved and hated the Painted Desert. Mescal was there in the purple shadows. He dreamed of her in the glowing embers of the log fire. He saw her on Black Belly, with flying hair free in the wind.

And he could not shut out the picture of her sitting in the corner of the room, silent, with bowed head, while the man to whom she was pledged hung close over her. That memory had a sting. It was like a spark of fire dropped in the wound in his breast where the desert hawk had struck him. It was like a light gleaming on the sombre line he was waiting to cross.

XIV

WOLF

On the anniversary of the night Mescal disappeared, the mysterious voice that called to Hare so strangely at long intervals pierced his slumber, and started him upright in his bed, shuddering and listening. The dark room was as quiet as a tomb. He fell back into his blankets, trembling with emotion. Of all the spiritually wild cries that had ever come whispering to him on the desert wind, or pealing through the vague, shadowy mists of a dream, this one was the wildest, the clearest, the most impossible to forget. Sleep did not again close his eyes that night, he lay in a fever, waiting for the dawn, and, when the gray gloom brightened, he knew what he must do.

After breakfast, he sought August Naab.

"May I go across the river?" he asked.

The old man looked up from his carpenter's task, and fastened his glance on Hare. "Mescal?"

"Yes."

"I saw it long ago." August soberly shook his head and spread his hands. "Is there any use for me to say what the desert is? You know. I see darkly here, but if you ever come back you will bring her. Yes, you may go. It's a man's deed. God keep you!"

Hare spoke to no other; he filled one saddlebag with grain, another with meat, bread, and dried fruits, strapped a five-gallon leather water-sack back of Silvermane's saddle, and set out toward the river.

Now that the thing was undertaken and that calm daylight reflection showed him no objective point, nothing but aimless wandering after a gleam, he had the cold, practical certainty of a range rider's judgment opposed to the feverish, imaginative, unintelligible impelling of will. Even so, he was happier than he had been in a year.

At the crossing-bar, he removed Silvermane's accouterments, and placed them in the boat. On the moment, a long howl as of a dog baying the moon started him out of his musings, and he surveyed the river bank, up and down, and then the opposite side. An animal, which he first took to be a gray timber-wolf, was running along the sand-bar of the landing.

"Pretty white for a wolf," he soliloquized. "Might be a Navajo dog."

The beast sat down on his haunches, and lifting a lean head, sent up a most doleful howl. Then, he began trotting along the bar, every few paces stepping to the edge of the water, and looking.

Presently, he spied Hare, and he began to bark furiously.

"It's a dog all right; wants to get across," said Hare. "Where have I seen him?"

Suddenly he sprang to his feet, almost upsetting the boat. "He's like Mescal's Wolf! It might be." He looked closer, his heart beginning to thump, and he yelled: "Ki-yi! Wolf. Hyer! Hyer!"

The dog leaped straight up in the air, and coming down, began to dash back and forth along the sand with piercing yelps.

"It's really Wolf! Mescal must be near," cried Hare. A red veil obscured his sight and every vein was like a hot cord. "Hi, good old dog! Coming — coming."

With fingers that seemed all thumbs, he tied Silvermane's bridle to the stern seat of the boat, and pushed

off. In his eagerness, he rowed too hard, dragging Silvermane's nose under water; he had to slow up. Time and again, he turned to yell to the dog. At length, the bow grated on the sand, and Silvermane emerged with a splash and a snort.

"Wolf! Wolf! Old fellow!" cried Hare. "Where's Mescal? Wolf, where is she?" Then he was hugging the dog. Wolf whined, and licked Hare's face, and, breaking away, ran up the sandy trail, and back again. But he barked no more; he waited to see if Hare was following.

"All right, Wolf — coming."

Never had Hare saddled so speedily, or leaped astride so quickly. He sent Silvermane into the willow-skirted trail close behind the dog, up on the rocky bench, and then under the bulging wall. What to think, to believe, he had no idea; he was all at sea; his blood raced; wonderful hopes succumbed to cold possibilities; he gazed with blurred eyes up the trail, expecting at every turn to see Mescal.

Wolf reached the level, where it wedged its sharp point between the cañon and Echo Cliffs, and then started straight west, toward the Painted Desert. He trotted a few rods, and turned to see if the man was coming.

Doubt, fear, uncertainty ceased for Hare. With the first blast of warm, dust-scented air in his face, he knew Wolf was leading him to Mescal, that the cry he had heard in his dream was hers, that the old mysterious promise of the desert had at last begun its fulfillment.

He gave one sharp, exultant answer to that call. The wide horizon, ever widening, lay before him, and the tree-less plains, the sun-scorched slopes, the great sandy stretches, the massed blocks of black mesas — all seemed serenely welcoming him, shining in a great

white light, like the light that shone in his soul. For Mescal was there.

Far away she must be, hidden as a grain of sand in all that world of drifting sands, perhaps ill, perhaps hurt, but alive, waiting for him, calling for him, crying out with a voice that no distance could silence. Wherefore, then, had this desert anything but welcome for him?

He did not see the sharp peaks as pitiless barriers, nor the mesas and domes as black-faced death, nor the moisture-drinking sands as life-sucking foes to plant and beast and man. That marvelously painted wonderland had sheltered Mescal for a year. He had loved it for color, change, its secrecy; he loved it, now, because it had not been a grave for Mescal, but a home. Therefore, he laughed at the deceiving yellow distances in the foreground of glistening mesas, at the deceiving purple distances of the great, far-off horizon.

The wind blew a song in his ears; the dry desert odors were fragrance in his nostrils; the sand tasted sweet between his teeth; and the dancing, quivering heat waves, veiling the desert in transparent haze, framed beautiful pictures for his eyes.

Wolf kept to the fore for some thirty paces, and, though he had ceased to stop, he still looked back to see if the horse and man were following. Hare had noted the dog occasionally in the first hours of travel, but he had given his eyes mostly to the broken line of sky and desert in the west, to the receding contour of Echo Cliffs, to the spread and break of the desert near at hand.

It was only when his excited fancy had cooled, and his interest in the features of the desert had somewhat tired, that Hare came to look closely at Wolf. What a lean, wild-appearing dog! But for his color, he could not have been distinguished from a real wolf. His head

and ears and tail drooped; even his long hair drooped, and he was lame in his right front paw.

Hare halted in the shade of a stone, dismounted, and called the dog to him. Wolf returned without quickness, without eagerness, or any of his old-time frisky friendliness of shepherding days. How sad were his eyes, how strange altogether he seemed! Hare encountered his first disquieting thought, and dispelled it with passionate force. Yet, the chill remained.

Lifting Wolf's paw, he discovered the ball of the foot worn through. Whereupon, he called into service a piece of buckskin, and fashioning a rude moccasin he tied it round the injured member. Wolf licked his hand, but there was no change in the sad light of his eyes. He turned toward the west, as if anxious to be off.

"All right, old fellow," said Hare; "only go slow. From the looks of the foot, I think you've turned back on a long trail."

Again they faced the west, dog leading, man following, and addressed themselves to an easy-swelling slope that had long hidden all in front except the tips of mesas and escarpments and mountain ranges. When it had been surmounted, Hare realized that all his ride, so far, had brought him only through an anteroom; the portal now stood open to the Painted Desert. The immensity of the thing seemed to reach up to him with a thousand lines, ridges, cañons, all ascending out of a purple gulf, all desert arms that wrapped his soul about and warmed while they chilled it.

As he descended into the valley, keeping close to Wolf, he marked a straight course in line with a volcanic spur; and he had cause to wonder when the dog, though continually threading jumbles of rock,

heading cañons, crossing deep washes, and going round obstructions, always veered back to this bearing as true as a compass needle to its magnet.

Hare was not long in discovering that the air had grown warmer and thicker, and this fact grew more appreciable as he continued the descent. Toward the middle of the afternoon, when he estimated that his travel had exceeded thirty miles since the start, he was perspiring freely, and Silvermane was moist. The time soon came when the clear, cool tang of the upland atmosphere died in the musty, heavy air of the desert valley. Looking backward, Hare had a blank feeling of loss; the sweeping line of Echo Cliffs had retreated behind the horizon. There was no familiar landmark left.

Sunset brought him to a standstill, as much from its sudden glorious gathering of brilliant crimsons splashed with gold, as from its herald that the day was done. There was a broken field of clouds in the west, like colored coral reefs pounded by a golden surf. They held the lighter gleams momentarily, then strained in fierce, burning red, lost their individuality in a flood of color that streamed over buttes and mesas, sands and cañons in burnished scarlet brilliancy.

Hare pitched camp beside a stone that would serve as a windbreak. He laid his saddle for a pillow and his blanket for a bed. He gave Silvermane a nose bag full of water, and then one of grain; he fed the dog, and afterward attended to his own needs. When his task was done, the desert brightness had faded to gray; the warm air had blown away on a cool breeze, and night approached.

He scooped out a little hollow in the sand for his hips, took a last look at Silvermane haltered to the rock, and, calling Wolf to his side, stretched himself to rest. He was used to lying on the ground, under the

open sky, out where the wind blew and the sand seeped; yet all these were different on this night. He was in the Painted Desert; Wolf crept close to him; Mescal lay somewhere under the blue-white stars.

He awakened, and arose before any color of dawn hinted of the day. While he fed his four-footed companions, the deep blue sky warmed and lightened. A tinge of rose gathered in the east. The air was cool and transparent. He tried to cheer and caress Wolf out of his sad-eyed forlornness, and failed. The dog started off, and stopped to look backward.

Hare vaulted into the saddle. The day had its possibilities, and, while he had sobered down and lost his exuberance at the press of something grim and hard, he had still the spring in his limbs, and the ring in his voice as he called:

“On, Wolf; on old fellow!”

Out of the east burst the sun, and the gray curtain lifted to shafts of pink and white and gold, streaking westward, long trails of color.

With the commencement of the journey, difficulties began to beset the dog, the overcoming of which persuaded Hare that Wolf was not tracking a back trail, but traveling by instinct. There were draws which necessitated searching on the rim for a place to cross, and areas of broken rock that had to be rounded, and steep, flat mesas ever rising in the path, and strips of deep sand and cañons impassable for long distance. But the dog always found a way and always came back to a line with the black spur that Hare had marked. It still stood in sharp relief, no nearer than before, receding with every step, an illusive, visionary landmark which Hare began to distrust.

Then, quite suddenly, it vanished in the ragged blue mass of the Ghost Mountains. Hare had seen

them several times, though never so distinctly as now. The purple tips, the bold rock ribs standing out, the shadowed cañons on the slopes, so sharp and clear in the morning light — how impossible to believe these were only a deceit of the desert mirage! Yet, so they were; even for the Navajos they were spirit mountains.

The rough splintered desert floor merged into an area of sand, and Wolf slowed his trot and Silvermane sank his hoofs and toiled. Dismounting, Hare labored beside him, and felt the heat steal through his boots and burn the soles of his feet. More heat rose from the sand than fell from the sun.

Hare plodded onward, stopping once to tie another moccasin on Wolf's worn-out paw, this time the left one; and often he pulled the stopper from the water bag and cooled his parching lips and throat. The waves of sand dunes were as the waves of the ocean. He did not look backward, dreading to see what little progress he had made.

Forward, were miles on miles of graceful heaps, swelling mounds, crested ridges, all different, yet regular and rhythmical, drift on drift, dune on dune, in endless line of rolling flow. Wisps of sand whipped from their summits in white, thin ribbons and wreaths, and pale clouds of sand shrouded little hollows. The morning breeze, rising out of the west, approaching in a white, rippling line, like the crest of an inflowing tide. How beautiful this drifting sea! What merciless change and gather and sweep away on the wind! How flimsy and flying this unstable sand, yet sure in its strength to cover the stones and fill the draws and expose the desert's bony ribs at its fickle, mutable will!

Silvermane snorted and lifted his ears, and looked westward toward a rising yellow pall that swooped up from the desert.

"Sandstorm," said Hare; and, calling Wolf, he made for the nearest rock large enough to shelter them.

The whirling sand cloud spread and bulged and mushroomed into an enormous desert covering, engulfing the dunes, obscuring the light, and approaching with strange, muffled roar. The sunlight failed; the day turned to gloom. Then, an eddying fog of sand and dust enveloped Hare. His last glimpse before he covered his face with a silk handkerchief, was of sheets of sand streaming level past his shelter. The storm bore a low, soft, hissing roar, like the sound in a seashell.

Breathing through the handkerchief, Hare avoided inhaling the sand that beat against his face; however, the finer dust particles filtered through and stifled him. At first, he felt that he would suffocate, and he coughed and gasped; but presently, when the thicker sand clouds had passed, he managed to get air enough. Then, he waited patiently while the steady, seeping rustle swept by, and the band of his hat sagged heavier, and the load on his shoulders had to be continually shaken off, and the weighty trap round his feet crept upward.

When the light, fine touch ceased, he removed the covering from his face to see himself standing nearly to his knees in sand, and Silvermane's back and the saddle burdened with it. The storm was moving eastward, a dull, ruddy red, now, with the sun faintly showing as a ball of magenta fire.

"Well, Wolf, old boy, how many storms like that will we have to weather?" asked Hare, in a cheery tone, which he had to force. He knew these sandstorms were but vagaries of the desert wind.

Before the hour closed, he had to seek the cover of a stone and wait for another to pass. Then, he was caught in the open, with not a shelter in sight, and

compelled to turn his back to a third storm, the worst of all, and stand as best he could the fierce, heavy impact of the first blow, and the succeeding rush and flow of sand. After that, his head drooped, and he wearily trudged beside Silvermane, dreading the interminable distance he had calculated he must cover before once more gaining hard ground. But he discovered that it was useless to try to judge distance on the desert. What had appeared miles at his last look turned out to be only rods.

How good it was to get into the saddle again and face clear air! Far away, the black spur again loomed up, now surrounded by groups of mesas with sage slopes tinged in green. That surely meant the end of this long trail; the faint spots of green lent suggestion of a desert water hole; there Mescal must be, hidden in some deep, shady cañon. Hare built his hopes anew.

So, he pressed on down a plain of bare rock dotted by huge boulders; and out upon a level floor of scant sage and greasewood, where a few living creatures — a desert hawk sailing low, lizards darting into holes, and a swiftly running ground bird — emphasized the lonely lack of life in the waste. He entered a zone of clay dunes, of wondrous violet and heliotrope hues; and then a valley of flinty ground and gravel that merged gradually as it fell into black, rugged patches.

Hare had entered the belt of lava and cactus. Reddish, conical points studded the desert, and a white, thin grass waved in meager strips. As he proceeded, the grass failed, and long streams of jagged lava flowed downward. Beds of cinders told of the fury of volcanic fire. Soon, Hare had to dismount to make moccasins for Wolf's hind feet; and to lead Silvermane carefully over the cracked lava.

For a while, there were strips of ground bare of lava, and harboring only an occasional bunch of cactus, but soon it got to be that every foot free of the reddish iron bore a projecting mass of fierce spikes and thorns. The huge, barrel-shaped cacti, and thickets of slender, dark-green rods with bayonet points, and low, broad leaves with yellowish spines, drove Hare and his sore-footed travelers to the lava.

Hare thought there must be an end to it some time, yet it seemed he was never to cross that black, fiendish belt. Blistered by the heat, pierced by the thorns, lame from long toil on the lava, he was sore spent when, once more, he stepped out upon the bare desert.

Upon pitching camp, he made the grievous discovery that the water bag had leaked or the water had evaporated, for there was only enough left for one more day. He ministered to thirsty dog and horse in silence, his mind revolving the stern, grim fact of his situation.

His little fire of greasewood threw a wan circle into the surrounding blackness. Not a sound breathed of action or life. He longed for even the bark of a coyote. Silvermane stooped motionless with tired head. Wolf stretched limply on the sand. Hare rolled into his blanket and lengthened out with slow, aching relief; and sleep, as if by magic, shut his eyelids. He did not awaken till later than his usual time; the blazing globe of the sun had already risen over the eastern horizon. The desert red swathed all the reach of valley.

Hare pondered the question of the water. Would he use it all at once, or sparingly? The ball of fire, a glazed circle, like iron at white heat, decided for him. The sun would be hot and would evaporate what water did not leak from the bag; so Hare shared

alike with Wolf, and gave the rest to Silvermane.

The dog waited, sad-eyed and gaunt, for Hare to start, and then limped westward. For an hour, the mocking lilac mountains hung in the air and then paled in the intense light. The day was soundless and windless, and the heat waves wafted up from the desert like smoke.

For Hare, the realities were the baked clay flats, where Silvermane broke through at every step, the beds of alkali, that sent aloft clouds of powdered dust, the deep gullies full of smooth, round boulders, thickets of mesquite and prickly thorn, which tore at his legs, and the weary detour to head the deepening cañons, the climb to get between two bridging mesas, and always the haunting presence of the sad dog. His unrealities were the shimmering sheets of water in every low place; the baseless mountains floating in the air; the green slopes rising close at hand, and beautiful buttes of dark blue riding the open sand, like monstrous barks at sea; the changing outlines of desert shapes in pink haze, and veils of purple and white luster — all illusions, all harmonious with fantasy, all mysterious, deceiving tricks of the mirage.

In the heat of midday, Hare yielded to its influence, and reined in his horse under a slate bank where there was shade. His face was swollen and peeling, and his lips had begun to dry and crack and taste of alkali. Silvermane was hot and tired, but showed no distress; and Wolf, refusing the shade, waited, looking backward with the sad eyes that had begun to haunt Hare. He did not stop long.

Wolf pattered on; Silvermane kept at his heels, clicking the stones; Hare dozed in the saddle. His eyes burned in the sockets from the glare, and it was ease to shut out the vast, arid, barren reaches. So the afternoon waned.

The tireless and implacable dog minded not the eye of the sun, or the never-ending monotony of slope, or the dreary rise of mesa. He pattered on, at long intervals to turn and look back.

Silvermane stumbled, jolting Hare out of his stupid lethargy. Before him spread a great field of boulders with not a slope or a ridge or mesa or escarpment. Not even a tip of a spur loomed in the background. He rubbed his sore eyes. Was this another illusion?

He called Wolf, already threading and winding a tortuous trail among the round stones. The dog stopped and waited. A second call, stern and quick, brought Wolf's head round over his shoulder, showing mournful eyes; but after a look, he pattered on.

Hare's spirit sickened within him. The dog had turned from the west and the direction of the upland green mesas under the black spur which had kept alive the spark of Hare's hope. He was headed south, and the range of the field of broken stones was immeasurable.

Had the dog gone mad wandering for his mistress? Was there any water out in that sea of stones? Did the horizon line tell the mocking story of mirage? Was it near or far? What lay beyond this sunset-colored plain where rocks were strewn thick as sage on the range? These questions attended Hare in his vacillation, and were unanswerable.

When Silvermane started onward, Hare thought of the Navajo's training to trust horse and dog. They were desert bred; beyond human understanding were their sight and scent. He was at the mercy, now, of Wolf's instinct and Silvermane's endurance. Resignation brought to Hare a certain calmness of soul, cold as the touch of an icy hand on fevered cheek.

He remembered the desert secret in Mescal's eyes; he was about to solve it. He remembered August

Naab's words; "It's a man's deed!" If so, he had achieved the spirit of it, if not the letter. He remembered Eschtah's tribute to the wilderness of painted wastes: "There is the grave of the Navajo, and no one knows the trail to the place of his sleep!" He remembered the something evermore about to be — the unknown subtly calling; and now it was revealed in the stone-fettering grip of the desert.

The gateway of the desert had swung wide to him, bright with its face of danger, beautiful with its painted windows, inscrutable with its alluring call; and, bidding him enter, had closed behind him, then to reveal its unmasked iron order, hateful of life; its convulsed bowels, racked by fire; its inevitable nature, harsh-voiced in travail!

XV

DESERT NIGHT

The gray stallion, finding the rein loose on his neck, trotted forward and overtook the dog, and thereafter jogged at his heels. With the setting of the sun, a slight breeze stirred, and freshened as twilight fell, rolling away the close, sultry atmosphere. Then, the black desert night mantled the plain.

For a while, this blackness alleviated the pain of Hare's sun-blinded eyes, and it was more than relief to have the unattainable horizon line blotted out. But by and by, when the impenetrable, pitchy darkness had become an opaque gloom to his strengthened eyes, it brought home to him as the day had never done the reality of his solitude and loneliness. He was alone in the immense place of barrenness, and his dumb companions were the world to him.

Wolf pattered onward, a gray, silent guide; and Silvermane followed, never lagging, sure-footed in the dark, faithful to his master. All the love Hare had borne the horse was as nothing to that which came to him on this desert night. In and out, round and round, ever winding, ever zigzagging, Silvermane hung close to Wolf, and the narrow, sandy lanes between the boulders gave forth no sound. Dog and horse, free to choose their trail, trotted onward miles and miles into the night.

The round disk of the moon silhouetted the black boulders on the horizon. It cleared the dotted, dark

line, and rose, an oval, orange-lined, strange moon, not mellow nor brightly silver nor gloriously soaring as Hare had known it in the past, but a vast, dead-gold, melancholy orb, rising sadly over the desert. To Hare, it was the crowning remainder of lifelessness; it fitted the world of dull, gleaming stones; it fixed his mood.

Silvermane went lame and slowed his trot, causing Hare to rein in and dismount. He lifted the right forefoot, the one the horse had favored, and found a sharp stone imbedded tightly in the hoof. It stuck so tight, and so resisted Hare's fingers that he had to pry it out with his knife. Then, he climbed astride once more.

Wolf shone faintly white far ahead, and, presently, he uttered an unearthly mourn that sent the cold chills over Hare. The silence had been oppressive before; now, it was terrible. It pressed the magnitude of the desert closer about him and the infinitude of the star-studded sky down upon him. It revealed to Hare that he was no more to these than a wisp of cloud or grain of sand. It was not a silence of life; it had broken sharply to Wolf's mourn, as if rent, and had closed sharply, without echo; it was a silence of death.

Hare took care not to fall behind Wolf again; he had no wish to hear that dire mourn repeated. Nor did the dog give vent to it again. But its effect persisted, and added another touch of gloom to Hare's mood. The dog moved onward with silent feet; the horse wound after him with hoofs padded in the sand; the moon lifted and the desert gleamed; the boulders grew larger and the lanes wider. So the desert night wore on, and Hare's eyelids fell weak for sleep, his whole weary body cried out for sleep, his bones ached for sleep. He would doze till he swayed in the saddle, and, righting himself, would fall into another doze. Then, a lurch and balk of Silvermane's

roused him; a rushing meteor had frightened the horse; the radiant ball with its tail of fire hissed by in the heavens, paled in the blue, and died. The east gave birth to the clear morning star. Wolf's form, gray in the waning moonlight, passed into the shade of rocks, winding through the labyrinthine lanes; and Silvermane ever stepped in his trail.

The whitening sky was the harbinger of day. Hare shunned facing the light and heat, and made his stop at a wind-worn cave under a shelving rock. He was asleep when he rolled out on the sand-strewn floor. Once, he awoke, and it was day, for his eyes quickly shut out the glare. He lay sweltering till, once more, slumber claimed him.

The dog awakened him, with cold nose and low whine. Another twilight had fallen. Hare crawled out, stiff and sore, hungry and parching with thirst. He made an attempt to eat, but it was a failure. There was a dry burn in his throat; and a queer dizzy feeling in his brain, a floating sensation succeeded by hot, red flashes before his eyes. Wolf refused meat, and stood waiting, with his eyes green and wild and sad in the waning twilight. Silvermane turned from the grain, and lowered his head to munch a few blades of desert grass.

Then the journey began, and the night fell black. The cold wind blew from the west, the white stars blinked, the weird moon rose with its ghastly glow, lifting the huge boulders out of the desert gloom, molding them with magic gleam. They lifted giant shapes out of the desert, carved by wind and sand, tombs and pillars and pedestals of nature's sepulcher.

But some had life in Hare's disordered fancy. They loomed and towered over him, and stalked abroad with shadows advancing, and peered at him with deep, dark eyes. Some followed, and some strode on

before; one ever kept the pace of the gray dog; another ever the pace of the gray horse; and all reared higher as Hare rode onward into the night, all lifted their misshapen heads, widened their wind-worn eyes, and spread longer arms.

Wolf penetrated this maze of monsters, and Silvermane moved on, his white mane streaming, and Hare fought his last against the mood of gloom. Wolf was not a phantom; he trotted forward with unerring instinct; he would find Mescal, the dark-eyed, the mystic-souled; and he would find water, that meant life before love. Silvermane, desert-stealed, would travel to the farthermost corner of this hell of sand-steeped stone.

Hare thought he himself was strong, enduring. But the battle of hope surrendered to the might of gloom. All about him was silence — great, breathing silence, insupportable silence of ages. Desert specters danced in the darkness. The worn-out moon gleamed golden over the worn-out waste. Desolation lurked under the sable shadows. All about him was boundless, fathomless gloom.

Hare rode on into the night, tumbled from his saddle in the gray of dawn to sleep, and stumbled in the twilight to his drooping horse, and followed the gray dog on again into the night. His eyes were blind, now, to the desert shapes, his brain burned, and his tongue filled his mouth. The gloomy hours passed, and the gray dog dragged his weary legs onward.

Silvermane ever trod upon Wolf's heels; he had come into the kingdom of his desert strength; he lifted his drooping head and lengthened his stride; weariness had gone, and he snorted his welcome to something on the wind. Then, he passed the limping, sad-eyed dog, and led the way.

Hare held to the pommel, and bent dizzily forward

in the saddle. Silvermane was going down, step by step, with metallic click on flinty rock. Whether he went down or up was all the same to Hare; he held on with closed eyes, and whispered ever in his mind. Down and down, step by step, long turn and then a short, jump by jump, cracking the stones with iron-shod hoofs, the gray stallion worked his perilous way, sure-footed as a mountain sheep. Then, he stopped with a great, slow heave, and bent his head.

The black bulge of a cañon rim blurred in Hare's tired, hot eyes. A faint, trickling sound penetrated his hot, tired brain. His ears had grown like his eyes — false. Only another delusion! As he had been tortured with the sight of lake and stream, now he was to be tortured with the sound of running water. Yet he listened, for it was sweet, even in its mockery. What a clear, musical tinkle, like silver bells tossing and kissing the wind! He listened. Soft, murmuring flow, babble and gurgle, little hollow fall and splash!

Suddenly, Silvermane heaved with a great sigh and, lifting his head, burst the silence of the cañon with a piercing snort. It pierced the dull fantasy of Hare's mind; it burst the gloomy spell. That snort was Silvermane's rattling whistle when he had drunk his fill.

Hare fell from the saddle. The gray dog lay stretched, bending low in the darkness. Hare crawled beside him and reached out with his hot hands. Smooth, cool, marble rock, growing slippery, then wet, led into running water. He slid forward on his face, and wonderful cold thrills quivered over his burning skin. He drank and drank until he could drink no more. Then he lay back upon the rock, and the madness in his brain went out with the light of the stars, and he slept.

When he awoke, red cañon walls leaned far above him to a gap filled by a stream of deep blue sky. A song of rushing water murmured near his ears. He

brought his gaze downward; a clear spring gushed from a crack in the wall; Silvermane cropped green bushes, and Wolf sat on his haunches, waiting, but no longer with sad eyes and strange mien.

Hare raised himself, looking again and again, and slowly gathered his wits. Wolf had led him to water, and Silvermane had carried him. The crimson blur had gone from his eyes, and the dry burn from his skin, and the painful swelling from his tongue.

He drank long and deeply, and, rising with clearing thoughts and thankful heart, kissed Wolf's white head, and laid his arms round Silvermane's neck and pressed his cheek against the flowing mane. He fed them, and partook of food himself, not without difficulty, for his lips were puffed and his tongue felt like a piece of rope. When he had eaten, his strength came back. Then, returning his attention to further progress, he remembered that Wolf had sheered south toward the cañon.

At a word, Wolf, with a wag of his tail, pattered into the gravelly stream bed, splashing water; and Hare followed on foot, leading Silvermane. There were little beds of pebbles, and beaches of sand, and short steps down which the water babbled. The cañon was narrow and tortuous; Hare could not see ahead or below, for the projecting red corners, growing higher as he descended, walled out the view. The blue stream of sky above grew bluer, and the light a shade less bright.

For an hour, he went down steadily without a check, and the farther down the rougher grew the way. Boulders began to lodge in narrow places and raise falls for the water to foam over. Silvermane clicked down confidently; many falls he rounded along the sides, others he climbed over carefully, and the bad ones with a drop of several feet he crashed down in

a way to cause Hare much concern.

The slender stream of water, augmented by seeping springs and little rills, gained the dignity of a brook; and began to dash merrily and hurriedly downward, with the depth of the falls, and the height of cliffs, and darkness of caves, and the size of boulders increasing in the descent. Wolf splashed on, unmindful; there was animation in his leaps, and, when he looked back for his laboring companions, there was friendly protest in his eyes.

Silvermane plainly showed that where a dog could go he could go, and he plunged over the rocky falls. It became necessary for Hare to hold him back, and stand warily before him on the brink of steep places, and coax him over. His iron shoes struck hollow sounds on the stones under water, and his snorts rang down the cañon. The gravelly wash jumped into a jagged red hole; and Hare clambered down over wet stones with fear for the horse. Silvermane, with fire in his eye, grinding, pounding down, slipped often, and slid to his haunches on wet inclines; but he never fell, and no obstruction, no depth daunted him.

The cañon narrowed as it deepened; the jutting walls leaned together, shutting out the light; the stream of sky above was now only a strip of blue, Hare had to throw back his head and look up to see it. Down and down for hours that seemed moments!

"It'll be easier climbing up, Silvermane — if we ever get the chance," panted Hare.

The sand and gravel and shale had disappeared; all was bare, clean-washed rock. In many places, the brook failed as a trail, for it leaped down in white sheets over mossy cliffs. Hare faced these walls in despair. But Wolf led on over the ledges, and Silvermane would not be denied. At last, Hare shrank back from a hole that defied him utterly. Even Wolf hesitated.

The cañon was barely twenty feet wide; the floor ended in a precipice; the stream leaped out, and fell into a dark cleft, from which no sound arose. On the right slope, a wall of shelf slanted out; it was scarce half a foot broad at the narrowest, and vanished to the dull light or ceased to be, Hare could not discern which. He stared helplessly up at the slanting, shut-in walls.

While he stared, Wolf pattered out upon the ledge, and Silvermane stamped restlessly. With a desperate fear of losing his beloved horse, Hare let go the bridle and stepped upon the ledge. He walked rapidly, for a slow step meant uncertainty, and a false one meant death. He heard the sharp, metallic click of Silvermane's shoes, and he listened in agonized suspense for the slip, the snort, the crash that he feared must inevitably come, but which did not come. Seeing nothing except the narrow ledge, yet feeling the blue abyss beneath him, he bent intense, keen effort to his task, and finally walked out into lighter space upon level rock. To his infinite relief, Silvermane appeared rounding a red corner out of the dark passage, and was soon beside him.

"My gray champion, what you can't do is beyond me!" exclaimed Hare.

The cañon widened; there was a clear demarcation where the red walls gave place to yellow; the brook showed no outlet from its subterranean channel. Wolf led down yellow slopes, and under toppling walls, and through shattered sections of cliff, always down and down. Outworn, nature made Hare forget his errand; the strength of his resolve had gone into mechanical toil; he kept on, thoughtless of distance, careful of Silvermane, and feeling the smart of bruised hands and knees and chafed feet, and the ache of laboring lungs.

Time went on, and the sun hung in the middle of the broadening belt of blue sky. A long slant of yellow slope led down to a sage-covered level, which Hare crossed, pleased to see blooming cacti, and wondering at slender, lofty, green stems shining with gold flowers. He descended into a ravine that became precipitous. Here, he made only slow advance.

Upon arriving at the bottom, he found himself in a wonderful lane with almost level floor and a shallow stream and fresh, green willows. Wolf took the direction of the flowing water. Hare's thought reverted to the object of this long trail, and his hopes began to mount, his heart to beat high.

He gazed ahead with straining eyes. What a winding lane! Presently, there was not a break in the walls. A drowsy hum of falling water came to Hare, and was strange reminder of the oasis, of the dull roar of the Colorado, and of Mescal.

His flagging energies leaped into life with the cañon suddenly opening to bright light and blue sky and beautiful valley, white and gold in blossom, green in grass and cottonwood. On a flower-scented wind rushed a muffled, soft roar, like distant thunder.

Wolf dashed into the cottonwoods, Silvermane whistled a piercing snort of satisfaction, and reached for the long grass.

For Hare, the light held something more than beauty, the breeze something more than sweet, moist scent of water and blossoms. Both were charged with overpowering portent.

Wolf appeared in the open, leaping up round a slender, brown-garbed form.

"Mescal!" cried Hare.

She ran toward him with arms outstretched,

her hair flying in the wind, her dark eyes wild with joy.

“Jack! Jack! Jack! Oh-h, Jack!”

The great cañon towers seemed toppling in Hare's blinded sight.

XVI

THUNDER RIVER

For an instant, Hare's brain reeled, and Mescal's broken murmurings were meaningless to him; then, his faculties grew steady and acute, and he held the girl as if he intended never to let her go, passionately sure that she was a warm, pulsating reality, glad in the sweet consciousness of her abandon.

Mescal clung to him with a wildness that gave him anxiety for her reason; there was something almost fierce in her grip on his arms and his shoulders, in the blind groping for his face, in the touch that lost tenderness in a rough madness for joy and doubt.

"Mescal! It's Jack, safe and well, come to take you home," he said. "Lift your face; let me look at you."

At the sound of his voice, all her tense strength changed to a yielding weakness; she leaned back, supported by his arms, and looked at him. Hare trembled before the dusky, level glance he remembered so well, and, as tears began to flow, he drew her head to his shoulder. He had forgotten to prepare himself for a different Mescal. Despite her quivering smile of happiness, what pain in her eyes! The oval contour; the rich bloom of her face had gone; beauty was there still, but it was the ghost of old beauty.

"Jack — is it — really you?" she asked.

"Assuredly," he said, and fell to kissing her.

She slipped out of his arms, breathless and scarlet. "Tell me all."

"There's much to tell on both sides, but not before you kiss me. It has been more than a year."

"Only a year! Have I been gone only a year?"

"Yes, a year; an endless year. But it's past, now, and I've found you, thank God! Kiss me, Mescal."

Shyly, she raised her hands to his shoulders, and put her lips to his. "Yes, you've found me, Jack, thank God, just about in time!"

"Mescal! What's wrong? Aren't you well?"

"Pretty well. But if you had not come soon, I should have starved."

"Starved? Let me get my saddlebags — I have bread and meat."

"Wait. I'm not hungry, now. I mean, very soon I should not have had any food at all."

"But your peon — the dumb Indian? Surely, he could find something to eat. What of him? Where is he?"

"My peon is dead. He has been dead for months, I don't know how many."

"Dead! What happened?"

"I never knew. I found him dead one morning, and I buried him in the sand."

Mescal led Hare under the cottonwoods, and pointed to the Indian's grave, now green with grass. Farther on, in a circle of trees, stood a little hogan skillfully constructed out of brush; the edge of a red blanket peeped from the door; a burnt-out fire smoked on a stone fireplace, and blackened earthen vessels lay near.

The cottonwoods were flying white seeds as light as feathers; plum trees were pink in blossom; vines were twining and hanging; through the openings in the foliage shone the blue of sky and red of cliff. Patches of blossoming flowers were here and there lit to brilliance by golden shafts of sunlight. The

twitter of birds and hum of bees were almost drowned in the soft roar of water.

"Is that the Colorado I hear?" asked Hare.

"No, that's Thunder River. The Colorado is farther down in the cañon."

"Farther down! Mescal, I must have come a mile down from the rim. Where are we, anyway?"

"We are almost at the Colorado, and directly under the head of Coconina. We can see the mountain from the break in the valley below."

"Come, sit by me here under this tree. Tell me — how did you ever get here?"

Mescal related how the peon had led her on a long trail from Bitter Seeps, how they had camped at desert water holes, and on the fourth day descended to Thunder River.

"I was quite happy, at first. It is always summer down here. There were rabbits, birds, beaver, and fruit — we had enough to eat. I explored the valley with Wolf, or rode Noddle up and down the cañon. Then, my peon died, and I had to shift for myself. There came a time when the beaver left the valley, and Wolf and I had to make a rabbit serve for days. I knew, then, I'd have to get across the desert to the Navajos or starve in the cañon. I hesitated about climbing out into the desert, for I wasn't sure of the trail to the water holes.

"Noddle wandered off up the cañon, and never came back. After he was gone, and I knew I couldn't get out, I grew homesick. The days weren't so bad, because I was always hunting for something to eat; but the nights were lonely. I couldn't sleep. I lay awake, listening to the river, and it got so I could hear whispering and singing and music and strange sounds and low thunder, always low thunder. I wasn't what you call frightened, only lonely; and the

cañon was so black and full of mutterings. Sometimes, I'd dream I was back on the plateau with you, Jack, and Bolly, and the sheep, and when I'd awake in the loneliness I'd cry right out —”

“Mescal, I heard those cries,” said Hare.

“Then I knew I must send Wolf home. How hard it was to make him go! But at last he trotted off, looking backward, and I waited and waited.”

She finished, and leaned against him, and the hand that had plucked at his sleeve dropped to his fingers, and there clung. Hare knew how her narrative had slighted the perils and privations of that long year. She had grown lonely in the cañon darkness; she had sent Wolf away, and had waited — all was said in that. But more than any speech the look of her, and the story told in the thin, brown hands, touched his heart.

Not for an instant since his arrival had she altogether let loose of his fingers, or coat, or arm. She had lived so long alone in this weird cañon of silence and thunder, where moving shadows and murmuring water had peopled her lonely world, that she needed to feel the substance of her hopes, to have physical assurance of the solidity of the man she loved.

“My mustang — Bolly — tell me of her,” said Mescal.

“Bolly's fine. Sleek and fat and lazy! She's been in the fields ever since you left. Not a bridle on her. Many times have I seen her poke her black muzzle over the fence and look down the lane. She's never forgotten you, Mescal.”

“Oh, how I want to see her! Tell me — everything.”

“Wait a little. Let me fetch Silvermane, and we'll make a fire and eat. Then —”

“Tell me now.”

“Well, Mescal, it's soon told.” Whereupon, he

began to acquaint her with the series of events growing out of her flight; and, when he recounted the story of the shooting at Silver Cup, Mescal rose with heaving bosom and blazing eyes.

"It was nothing — I wasn't hurt much. Only the intention was bad. We saw no more of Snap or Holderness. The worst of it all was that Snap's wife died."

"Oh, I am sorry — sorry. Poor Father Naab! How he must hate me, the cause of it all! But I couldn't stay — I couldn't marry Snap."

"Don't blame yourself, Mescal. What Snap might have done if you had married him is a matter of conjecture. He might have left drink alone a while longer. But he was bad clean through. I heard Dave Naab tell him that. Snap would have gone over to Holderness sooner or later. And now he's a rustler, if not worse."

"Then Dene, Holderness, those men who hated you, think Snap killed you?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What's going to happen some day, when you meet Snap, or any of them?"

"Somebody will be surprised," replied Hare, with a laugh.

"Jack, it's no laughing matter!" She fastened her hands in the lapels of his coat and gravely eyed him. "You can never hang up your gun again."

"No. But perhaps I can keep out of their way, especially Snap's. Mescal, you've forgotten Silvermane, and how he can run."

"I haven't forgotten. He can run, but he can't beat Bolly." She said this with a hint of her old spirit. "Jack — you want to take me back home?"

"Of course. What did you expect when you sent Wolf?"

"I didn't expect. I just wanted see you, or some-

body, and I thought of the Navajos. Couldn't I live with them? Why can't we stay here or in a cañon across the Colorado where there's plenty of game?"

"I'm going to take you home, and Father Naab shall marry you — to — to me."

Startled, Mescal fell back upon his shoulder, and did not stir nor speak for a long time. "Did — did you tell him?"

"Yes."

"What did he say? Was he angry? Tell me."

"He was kind and good, as he always is. He said if I found you, then the issue was between Snap and me, as man to man. You are still pledged to Snap in the Mormon Church, and that can't be changed. I don't suppose, even if he's outlawed, that it could be changed."

"Snap will not let any grass grow in the trails to the oasis," said Mescal. "Once he finds I've come back to life, he'll have me. You don't know him, Jack. He's terrible, once he sets his mind. I daren't go home."

"My dear, there's no other place for us to go. We can't live the life of Indians."

"But, Jack, think of me watching you ride out from home, fearful that you may never ride in! Think of me always looking for Snap! I couldn't endure it. I've grown very weak in this year of absence."

"Mescal, look at me." His voice rang as he held her by the shoulders so she had to face him. "This is the moment. We've got to decide everything. Let me see your eyes. I have never known what I was going to do. But your eyes will tell me. Now — say you love me!"

"Yes — yes."

"Say it."

"I — love you — Jack."

"Say you will marry me!"

"I will marry you."

"Then listen. I will get you out of this cañon and take you home. You are mine, and I will keep you." He held her tightly with strong arms; his face paled, his eyes darkened. "I do not want to meet Snap Naab. I shall try to keep out of his way. I hope I can. But, Mescal, I am yours now. Your happiness, perhaps your life, depends on me. That makes a difference. Understand!"

Silvermane walked into the glade with a saddle girth so tight that his master unbuckled it only by dint of repeated effort; manifestly the rich grass of Thunder River Cañon appealed strongly to the desert stallion.

"Here, Silver, how do you expect to carry us out, if you eat and drink like that?" Hare removed the saddle and tethered the gray to one of the cottonwoods. Wolf came trotting into camp, proudly carrying a rabbit.

"Mescal, can we get across the Colorado and find a way up over Coconina?"

"Yes, I'm sure we can. My peon never made a mistake about directions. There's no trail, but Navajos have crossed the river at this season, and worked up a cañon."

The shades had gathered under the cliffs, and the rosy light high up on the ramparts had chilled and dulled when Hare and Mescal sat down to their meal. Wolf lay close to the girl and begged for morsels. Hare was so divided between his joy in seeing Mescal appease her hunger, and his reproach to himself because he had let her wait, that he scarcely ate enough to satisfy his own appetite. But he fed his

soul with the several strange little smiles which broke the stillness of Mescal's face. Then, in the twilight, they sat together, content to be silent, listening to the low thunder of the river.

Long after Mescal had retired into her hogan, Hare lay awake before her door with his head in his saddle and listened to the low roll, the dull burr, the dreamy hum of the tumbling waters. The place was like the oasis, only infinitely more lost under the cliffs. A few stars twinkled out of the dark blue, and one hung beaconlike on the creast of a noble crag.

There were times when he imagined the valley was as silent as the desert night; and other times when he imagined he heard the thundering roll of avalanches, the tramp of armies, the stampede of sheep. Then the voices of Mescal's solitude, spoke to him — glorious laughter and low, sad wails of woe, sweet songs and whispers and murmurs. His last waking thought was of the haunting sound of Thunder River, and that he had come to bear Mescal away from its loneliness.

He bestirred himself at the first pale glimpse of day; and when the gray mists had lifted to wreath the crags, it was light enough to begin the journey.

Mescal shed tears at the grave of the faithful peon. "He loved this cañon," she said softly.

Hare lifted her upon Silvermane. He walked beside the horse, and Wolf trotted on before. They traveled a while under the flowering cottonwoods on a trail bordered with green tufts of grass and great star-shaped lilies. The river was still hidden, but it filled the grove with its soft thunder. Gradually, the trees thinned out, hard, stony ground encroached upon the sand, boulders appeared in the way; and, presently, when Silvermane stepped out of the shade of the cottonwoods, Hare saw the lower end of the valley with its ragged vent where they would go down.

"Look back!" said Mescal.

Then Hare saw the river bursting from the base of the great wall in two white streams that soon united below, and from there leaped in continuous cascade, white as snow, down through the green grove. Step by step, the stream plunged down through the deep gorge, a broken strip of foam, and at the lower end of the valley it took its final leap into a blue abyss.

"It runs underground to the Colorado," explained Mescal.

"I want to come here again some day."

"You must bring me. Good-by, Thunder River."

The fragrant, flower-scented breeze and rumbling of the river persisted long after the valley lay behind and above, but these failed at length in the close, confined air of huge walls. The light grew thick, the stones cracked like deep bell strokes; the voices of man and girl had a hollow sound and echo. Silvermane clicked down the easy trail at a gait that urged Hare now and then to a little trot.

Soon, the gully opened out upon a plateau through the centre of which, in a black split, wound the red Colorado, sullen-voiced, booming, never silent nor restful. Here were distances by which Hare could begin to comprehend the immensity of the cañon, and he felt lost among the great terraces leading up to mesas that dwarfed the Echo Cliffs. All was bare rock of many hues, burning under the sun.

"Jack, this is mescal," said the girl, pointing to some towering plants.

All over the sunny slopes, cacti lifted lofty, slender shafts, unfolding in spiral leaves as they shot upward, and bursting at the top into plumes of yellow flowers. Some were bare and dead, bleached spear points. The blossoming stalks waved in the wind, and huge, black bees circled around them.

"Mescal, I've always wanted to see the Flower of the Desert, from which you're named; and it's beautiful."

Hare broke a dead stalk of the cactus and was put to instant flight by a stream of black bees pouring with angry buzz from the hollow centre. Two big fellows were so persistent that he had to beat them off with his hat.

"You shouldn't despoil their homes," said Mescal, with a peal of laughter.

"I'll break another stalk and get stung, if you'll laugh again," replied Hare.

They traversed the remaining slope of the plateau, and, entering the head of a ravine, descended a steep cleft of black, flinty rock so hard that Silvermane's iron hoofs not so much as scratched it, and, reaching a level, passed out to smooth, rounded sand and the river.

"It's a little high," said Hare dubiously. "Mescal, I don't like the looks of those rapids."

Only a few hundred rods of the river could be seen. In front of Hare, the current was swift, but not broken. Above, where the marble cañon turned, the river sheered out with a majestic roll, and, falling in wide, smooth curve, suddenly broke into turbulent action with its fiercest energy in a wedge-shaped formation, the apex of leaping, reddish waves downstream. Below Hare was a rapid of less magnitude, with the broken water mostly turning toward the near side of the river; still, there were twisting, yellowish swirls and curled, vicious waves and sullen bellow enough to make his flesh creep.

"I guess we'd better risk it," said Hare, grimly recalling the hot rock, the sand and lava and cactus of the desert.

"It's safe, if Silvermane is a good swimmer,"

replied Mescal. "We can take the river above and cut across so the current will help."

"Silvermane loves the water. I think he used to swim the Sevier River up in Utah. He'll make this crossing easily. But he can't carry us both, and it's impossible to make two trips. I'll have to swim."

Without wasting more words and time in the consideration of an undertaking that would only grow more formidable with every look and thought, Hare led Silvermane up the sand bar to its limit. He removed his coat, and strapped it behind the saddle; his belt and revolver and boots he hung over the pommel.

"How about Wolf? I'd forgotten him."

"Never fear for him! He'll stick close to me."

"Now, Mescal, there's the point we want to make, that bar; see it?"

"Surely, we can land above that."

"I'll be satisfied; I'll be humbly thankful if we get even there. You guide him for it. And, Mescal, here's my gun. Try to keep it from getting wet. Balance it on the pommel — so. Come, Silver! Come, Wolf!"

"Keep upstream," called Mescal, as Hare plunged in. "Don't drift below us."

In two steps, Silvermane went in to his saddle, and in two more he rolled, with a splash and a snort, sinking Mescal to her hips. Nose level with the water, mane and tail floating, he swam powerfully with the current.

For Hare, the water was just cold enough to be delightful after the long, hot descent, but it had the most singular quality of any water in which he had ever swum. Keeping upstream of the horse, and even with Mescal, he swam with long, regular strokes for perhaps one quarter of the distance; then, when they reached the swirling, gurgling eddies, he found that he was quickly tiring. The water was thick and

heavy; it compressed his lungs and dragged at his feet.

He whirled round and round in the eddies, and saw Silvermane doing the same. Only by violent force, by literally pushing himself, could he breast his way out of these whirlpools. When a wave slapped his face, he tasted sand, and then knew what was the singular quality of this river. Sand! Sand, as on the desert! Even in the depths of the cañon, he could not escape it.

As the current grew rougher, he began to feel that he could scarcely spread his arms in the wide, long stroke. It was as if they were weighted down. Changing the stroke, he discovered he could not keep up with Silvermane, and he changed back again. Gradually, his feet sank lower and lower, the water pressed tighter round him, his arms seemed to grow useless, strengthless. It was when he realized he could not keep up much longer that he remembered August Naab saying the Navajos did not attempt to swim the river when it was in flood and full of sand. Whereupon, he ceased to struggle, and, drifting with the current, soon was close to Silvermane, and grasped a saddle strap.

"Not there!" called Mescal. "He might strike you. Hang to his tail!"

Hare dropped behind, and, catching Silvermane's long tail, held on firmly. How easily the stallion towed him! The waves dashed over his rump, and lapped at Mescal's waist; and the current grew stronger, sweeping Silvermane down out of line with the black wall that had frowned closer and closer.

Mescal lifted the long rifle, and, resting the stock on the saddle, held it upright. The roar of the rapid that had bellowed in Hare's ears seemed to retreat, to lose its volume, and, presently, it died in the splashing and slapping of broken water closer at hand. Then, Mescal turned to him with eyes glancing darkly

bright, and, curving her hand about her lips, she shouted:

"Can't make the bar! We've got to go through this side of the rapids. Hang on!"

In a swelling din of watery sounds, Hare felt the irresistible pull of the current; and, as he held on with both hands, hard pressed to keep his grasp, Silvermane dipped over a smooth, low fall in the river. Then, Hare was riding the rushing water of an incline. It ended below in a back-lashing, red-crested wave, and beyond was dinning chaos of angry, curling breakers.

Hare had one glimpse of Mescal crouching low, shoulders narrowed and head bent; then, with one white flash of the stallion's mane against her flying black hair, she went out of sight in upspurting waves and spray.

Hare was thrown forward into the back lash of the wave. The shock blinded him, stunned him, almost tore his arms from his body, but his hands were so twisted in Silvermane's tail that the force of the drag could not loosen them. The current threw him from wave to wave, with crash and buffet and pound. He was dragged through a caldron, blind from stinging blows, deaf from the tremendous roar. Then, the fierce contention of waves lessened, the threshing crisscross of currents straightened, and he could breathe once more.

Silvermane dragged him steadily; the roar grew to be a sound, instead of a ponderous weight in his ears; the current ceased to sway his legs upward; and, finally, his feet touched the ground. He could scarcely see, so full were his eyes of the sandy water, but he made out Mescal rising from the water on Silvermane, as with loud snorts he climbed to a bar. Hare staggered up, and fell on the sand.

"Jack, are you all right?" inquired Mescal.

"All right, only pounded out of breath, and my eyes are full of sand. How about you?"

"I don't think I ever was any wetter," replied Mescal, laughing. "It was hard to stick on, holding the rifle. That first wave almost unseated me. I was afraid we might strike the rocks, but the water was deep. Silvermane is grand, Jack. Wolf swam out above the rapids, and was waiting for us when we landed."

Hare wiped the sand out of his eyes, and got to his feet, finding himself little the worse for the incident. Mescal was wringing water from the long, straight braids of her hair. She was smiling, and a tint of color showed in her cheeks. The wet buckskin blouse and short skirt clung tightly to her slender form. She made so pretty a picture and appeared so little affected by the peril they had just passed through that Hare, yielding to a tender rush of pride and possession, kissed the pink cheeks till they flamed.

"All wet," said he, "you and I, clothes, food, guns — everything."

"It's hot, and we'll soon dry," returned Mescal. "Here is the cañon and creek we must follow up to Coconina. My peon mapped them in the sand for me, one day. It'll probably be a long climb, but not steep."

Hare poured the water out of his boots, pulled them on, and, helping Mescal to mount Silvermane, he took the bridle over his arm, and led the way into a narrow, black-mouthed cañon, through which flowed a stream of clear water. Wolf splashed and pattered along beside him. Beyond the black marble rock, this creek cañon opened out to great breadth and wonderful walls.

Hare had eyes only for the gravelly bars and shallow, rocky levels of the creek, and, intent on finding the easy going for his horse, he strode on and

on, thoughtless of time. Nor did he talk to Mescal, for the work was hard, and he needed his breath.

Splashing the water, clicking the stones, Silvermane ever kept his nose at Hare's elbow. They climbed little ridges, making short cuts from point to point, and threaded miles of narrow, winding, creek floor, and passed under ferny cliffs, and over grassy banks and through thickets of yellow willow.

As they wound along the course of the creek, always up and up, the great walls imperceptibly lowered their rims. The warm sun soared to the zenith. Jumble of boulders, stretches of white gravel, ridges of sage, blocks of granite, thickets of manzanita, long, yellow slopes, crumbling crags, clumps of cedar and lines of piñon — all were passed in persistent, plodding climb. The cañon grew restricted toward its source; the creek lost its volume; patches of snow gleamed in sheltered places. At last, the yellow-streaked walls edged out upon a grassy hollow, and the great, dark, magnificent pines of Coconina shadowed the snow.

"We're up," panted Hare. "What a climb! Five hours! One more day — then, home!"

Silvermane's ears shot up, and Wolf barked. Two gray deer loped out of a thicket, and turned inquisitively. Reaching for his rifle, Hare threw back the lever, but the action clogged, it rasped with the sound of crunching sand, and the cartridge could not be pressed into the chamber or ejected. He fumbled about the breech of the gun, and his brow clouded.

"Sand! Out of commission!" he exclaimed. "Mescal, I don't like that."

"Use your Colt," suggested Mescal.

The distance was too great for the smaller firearm; Hare missed, and the deer bounded away into the forest.

Hare built a fire under a sheltering pine where no snow covered the soft mat of needles, and, while Mescal dried the blankets and roasted the last portion of meat, he made a windbreak of spruce boughs. When they had eaten, not forgetting to give Wolf a portion, Hare fed Silvermane the last few handfuls of grain, and tied him with a long halter on the grassy bank.

The daylight failed, and darkness came on apace. The old familiar roar of the wind in the pines was perturbing; it might have meant only the lull and crash of the breaking night gusts, and it might have meant the north wind, storm, and snow. It whooped down the hollow, scattering the few scrub-oak leaves, and whirred the red embers of the fire away into the dark to sputter in the snow, and blew the burning logs into white glow. Mescal slept in the shelter of the spruce boughs, with Wolf snug and warm beside her; and Hare stretched his tired limbs in the heat of the blaze.

When he awakened, the fire was low, and he was numb with cold. He took care to put on logs enough to last until morning; then, he lay down once more, but did not sleep. The dawn came with a gray morning shade in the forest; it was a cloud, and it rolled over him soft, tangible, moist, and cool, and passed away under the pines. With its vanishing, the dawn lightened.

"Mescal, if we're on the spur of Coconina, it's only ten miles or so to Silver Cup," said Hare, as he saddled Silvermane. "Mount, now, and we'll go up out of the hollow and get our bearings."

While ascending the last step to the rim, Hare revolved in his mind the probabilities of marking a straight course to Silver Cup.

"Oh, Jack!" exclaimed Mescal suddenly. "Vermilion Cliffs and home!"

"I've traveled in a circle!" replied Hare.

Mescal was enraptured at the scene, as her gaze signified. Vermillion Cliffs shone red as a rose. The split in the wall, marking the oasis, defined its outlines sharply against the sky. Miles of the Colorado River lay in sight. Hare knew he stood on the highest point of Coconina overhanging the cañon and the Painted Desert, thousands of feet below. He sighted the wondrous abyss sleeping in blue mist at his feet while he gazed across to the desert awakening in the first red rays of the rising sun.

Sand — lava — plain — mesa — were mere colored dots and streaks in space, softening aspects of a marginless waste, purple details that led the eye to where a dim horizon merged in the heavens. The same alluring desert, yet how different! He had felt its dry teeth in his life; he had crossed it; he knew its deceiving distances; still was it a mystery.

He followed the Little Colorado winding down through the Painted Desert to join the great river, and his survey brought the chasm directly under his eye. He echoed Mescal's exclamation, and, reaching for her hand, held it while he tried to comprehend the awe-inspiring spectacle. He stood on the edge of a ruined world of stone. Where was the sea that had not been filled by the silt washed from this gap? The huge domes, the escarpments, the pinnacles and turrets were draped in gray. Deep, dark blue marked the clefts between the mesas, and the tips of the crags caught the rose of the sun. There were no sudden changes, no sudden breaks — all the millions of slopes and terraces merged together, enfolded in soft haze, soft mist, soft cloud, in one soft effect of entrancing beauty.

"Mescal, your Thunder River Cañon is only one little crack in the rocks lost in the immensity of this stupendous chasm," said Hare.

"It's lost, surely. I can't even see the tip of the peak that stood so high over the valley."

Once more turning to the left, Hare ran his eye over the Vermillion Cliffs, and the strip of red sand shining under them, and, so calculating his bearings, he headed due north for Silver Cup.

What with the snow and the soggy ground, the first mile was laborsome going for Hare, and Silvermane often sank deep. Once off the level spur of the mountain, they made better time, for the snow thinned out on the slope and gradually gave way to the long, brown, dry aisles of the forest.

Hare mounted in front of Mescal, and put the stallion to an easy trot; and, after two hours of riding, they struck a bridle trail that Hare recognized as one leading down to the spring. In another hour, they reached the steep slope of Coconina, and saw the familiar red wall across the valley, and caught glimpses of gray sage patches.

"I smell smoke," said Hare.

"The boys must be at the spring," rejoined Mescal.

"Maybe. I want to be sure who's there. We'll leave the trail, and slip down through the woods to the left. I wish we could get down on the home side of the spring. But we can't; we've got to pass it."

With many a pause to peer through opening in the pines, Hare traversed a long, diagonal course down the slope, crossed the line of cedars, and reached the edge of the valley a mile or more above Silver Cup. Then he turned toward it, still cautiously leading Silvermane under cover of the fringe of cedars.

"Mescal, there are too many cattle in the valley," he said, looking at her significantly.

"They can't be all ours, that's sure," she replied.
"What do you think?"

"Holderness!" With the word, a cold shade overshadowed Hare's face. He continued to advance, guardedly leading the horse under the cedars, careful to avoid breaking brush and rattling stones, occasionally whispering to Wolf; and so worked his way along the curved margin of the woody slope till farther progress was impeded by the bulging wall of rock.

"Only cattle in the valley; no horses," he said. "I've a good chance to cut across this curve and reach the trail. If I take time to climb up and see who's at the spring, maybe the chance will be gone. I don't believe Dave and the boys are there."

He pondered a moment, then climbed up in front of Mescal, and directed the gray out upon the valley. Soon, he was among the grazing cattle, and felt no surprise to see the H brand on their flanks.

"Jack, look at that brand," said Mescal, pointing to a white-flanked steer. "There's an old brand like a cross, Father Naab's cross, and a new brand, a single bar. Together, they make an 'H'!"

"Mescal! You've hit it! I remember that steer. He was a very devil to brand. He's the property of August Naab, and Holderness has added the bar, making a clumsy 'H.' What a rustler's trick! It wouldn't deceive a child."

They had reached the cedars and the trail, when Wolf began to sniff suspiciously at the wind.

"Look!" whispered Mescal, calling Hare's attention from the dog. "Look! A new corral!"

Bending back to get in line with her pointing finger, Hare looked through a network of cedar boughs to see a bright fence of yellow, stripped pines. Farther up were piles of unstripped logs, and close by

the spring, a large, new cabin, with blue smoke curling from a stone chimney.

Hare guided Silvermane off the trail to softer ground, and once more advanced, climbed the gentle slope, passed the old pool, now a mud puddle, and crossed the dry wash, to be brought suddenly to a halt. Wolf had made an uneasy stand, with his nose pointing to the left, and Silvermane shot up his ears. Presently, Hare heard the soft stamp of hoofs off in the cedars, and, before he had fully determined from which the sound came, three horses and a man stepped from the shade into a sunlit space.

As luck would have it, Hare happened to be well screened by a low, thick cedar; and, as there was a possibility that he might remain unseen, he chose to take it. Silvermane and Wolf stood still in their tracks. Hare felt Mescal's hands tighten on his coat, and he pressed them softly to reassure her. Peeping out from his covert, he saw a man in his shirt sleeves leading the horses — a slim, clean-faced, dark-haired man — Dene!

The blood beat hot into Hare's temples, and he gripped the handle of his Colt. What fatal chance sent the outlaw toward that trail? He was whistling; he had two halters in one hand, and with the other he led his bay horse by the mane. Then Hare saw that he wore no belt; he was unarmed; on the horses were only the halters and swinging, clinking hobbles. Hare dropped his Colt back into its holster.

Dene sauntered on, whistling a Dixie tune, and, when he got off the trail, instead of crossing it, as Hare hoped, he turned into it and came down.

Hare swung the switch he had broken from an aspen, and struck Silvermane a stinging blow on the flanks. The gray bolted forward as if slung from a catapult.

The crash of brush and thump of hoofs stamped

Dene's horses in a twinkling. But the outlaw paled to a ghastly, livid white, and seemed rooted to the trail.

"Dene's spy!" yelled Hare.

It was not fear of a man or a horse that held Dene fixed; in his starting, black eyes was the terror of the supernatural.

The shoulder of the charging stallion struck Dene, and sent him spinning out of the trail. In a backward glance, Hare saw the outlaw fall, and rise unhurt to wave his fists wildly and with loud yells start running in the direction of the cabin.

XVII

THE SWOOP OF THE HAWK

"Jack, the saddle's slipping!" cried Mescal, clinging closer to him.

"What luck!" Hare muttered through clinched teeth, and pulled hard on the bridle. But the mouth of the stallion was iron; he minded not at all the sawing bit, and galloped on. Hare called steadily: "Whoa, there, Silver! Whoa! slow, now! Whoa! Easy!" and finally got him halted. Hare swung down, and, as he lifted Mescal off, the saddle slipped to the ground with a flop.

"Lucky we are, not to get a spill! The girth snapped. It was wet, and dried out." Hare hurriedly began to repair the break with buckskin thongs he found in a saddlebag.

"Listen! Hear the yells! Oh, hurry!" cried Mescal.

"I've never ridden bareback. Suppose you go ahead with Silver, and I'll hide in the cedars till dark, then walk home?"

"No — no. There's time — but hurry."

"It's got to be strong," muttered Hare, holding the strap over his knee, and pulling the laced knot with all his strength, "for we'll have to ride some. If it comes loose — good-by!"

Silvermane's broad chest muscles rippled, and he stamped restlessly. The dog whined and looked back. Mescal had the blanket smooth on the gray when Hare threw the saddle over him. The yells had ceased,

but clattering hoofs on the stony trail were a greater source for anxiety. While Hare's brown hands worked swiftly over buckle and strap, Mescal climbed to a seat behind the saddle.

"Get in the saddle," said Hare, leaping astride and pressing forward over the pommel. "Slip down — there! And hold to me! Go, Silver!"

The rapid pound of the stallion's hoofs drowned the clatter coming up the trail. A backward glance relieved Hare, for dust clouds some few hundred yards in the rear located the position of the pursuing horsemen. He held Silvermane in to a steady gallop. The trail was uphill and steep enough to wind even a desert racer, if put to his limit.

"Look back! Look back!" cried Mescal. "Can you see them? Is Snap with them?"

"I can't see for trees," replied Hare, over his shoulder. "There's dust — we're far in the lead — never fear, Mescal. The lead's all we want."

Cedars grew thickly all the way up the steeper part of the divide, and ended abruptly at the edge of scaly stone, where the ascent became so gradual that it was noticeable only in long distances. When Silvermane struck out of the grove upon this slope, Hare kept turning keen glances rearward. The dust cloud rolled to the edge of the cedars, and out of it trooped half a dozen horsemen, who began to fire their rifles as soon as they got into the open. Bullets zipped along the red stone, cutting little puffs of red dust, and whistled through the air.

"The cowards!" ejaculated Hare. "They're firing on us! They'd shoot a woman!"

"Has it taken you so long to learn that?"

The reply, almost a rebuke, acted upon Hare as powerfully as the fact it portended. How doggedly his nature had struggled against the acceptance of this

bloody, desert truth! He slashed his steed with the switch. Silvermane needed no goad or spur; he had been shot at before, and the sing of one bullet was sufficient to stretch his gallop into a run. When he began to run, the distance between him and his pursuers widened so materially that he was soon out of range.

The shrill yells the rustlers suddenly emitted were taken by Hare to be signals of baffled rage; but Mescal's quick, startled cry showed him where he was wrong. Other horsemen appeared ahead and to the right of him, tearing down the ridge to the divide. Evidently, they had been returning from the western curve of Coconina.

The direction in which Silvermane was stretching lower and lower was the only possible one for Hare. If he swerved off the trail to the left, it would be upon rough, rising ground. Not only must he beat this second band of rustlers to the point where the trail went down on the other side of the divide, but, also, he must get beyond it before they came within rifle range.

There was a tight band around Hare's waist — it was Mescal's arms. There was an oppression round his breast — that was fear for the girl.

"Now! Silver! Go! Go!" Fast as the noble stallion was speeding, he answered to the call. He was in the open, now, free of stones and brush, with the spang of rifles in the air. The wind rushed into Hare's ears, filling them with hollow roar and rhythmic, fast beats of hoofs.

The horsemen cut down the half mile to a quarter, lessened that, swept closer and closer, till Hare recognized Chance and Culver, and Snap Naab on his cream-colored pinto; then, seeing that they could not

head the invincible stallion, they sheered more to the right. But Silvermane thundered on, crossing the line ahead of them at full three hundred yards, and went over the divide, drawing them in behind him.

Then, with the sharp crack and spang of carbines, leaden messengers whizzed high in the air over horse and riders, and skipped along the red shale in front of the running dog.

"Oh, Silvermane!" cried Hare. It was just a call, as if the horse were human, and could appreciate what that coursing, fleet pace meant to his master. The stern business of the race had ceased to be for Hare. Silvermane was out to the front! He was like a level-rushing thunderbolt. Hare felt the instantaneous pause between his long, low leaps, the gather of mighty muscles, the strain, the tension, then the quivering expulsion of force.

It was a perilous ride down that red slope, not so much from the hissing bullets, as the washes and gullies which Silvermane sailed over in magnificent leaps; but Hare thrilled with savage delight in the wonderful prowess of his desert king, in the primal instinct of joy at escaping with the woman he loved.

"Outrun!" he cried, with blazing eyes on Snap Naab, the foremost pursuer.

Mescal's white face was pressed close to his shoulder, and he smiled.

"Dear, Silver has beaten them. They'll hang on till we reach the sand strip, hoping the slowdown will let them come up in time. But they'll be long too late."

The rustlers continued on the trail, firing desultorily, till Silvermane so far outdistanced them that even the necessary lapse into a walk in the red sand placed him beyond range when they arrived at the strip.

"They've turned back, Mescal. We're safe. Why, you look like you did the day the bear ran for you!"

"I'd rather a bear got me than Snap. Jack, did you see him?"

"See him? Rather! I'll bet he nearly killed his pinto. Mescal, what do you think of Silvermane, now? Can he run? Can he outrun Bolly?"

"Yes — yes. Oh, Jack, how I'll love him! Look back again. Are we safe? Will we ever be safe?"

It was still daylight when they rounded the red buttress of the oasis and entered the level lane with the familiar wall on one side, the white, peeled fence pickets on the other. Wolf dashed on ahead, and presently a chorus of barks announced that he had been met by the other dogs. Silvermane vented his shrill neigh, and the horses and mustangs in the corrals trooped noisily to the lower sides and hung inquisitive heads over the top bars.

A Navajo, whom Hare remembered, stood leaning on his axe by the woodpile, and Judith Naab dropped a bundle of sticks, and, with a cry of gladness, ran for the house. Before Silvermane had come to a full stop, Mescal was off, and she put her arms round his neck and kissed him; then she darted toward the corral, where a little black mustang had begun to whistle and stamp and try to climb over the bars.

August Naab, bareheaded, with gray, shaggy locks shaking at every step, strode off the porch, and his great hands lifted Hare from the saddle.

"Every day I've watched the river for you," he said. His eyes were warm, and his grasp like a vise.

"Mescal — child!" he continued, as she came running to him. "Safe and well. He's brought you back. Thank the Lord!" He look her to his breast, and bent his gray head over her.

Then the crowd of big and little Naabs burst noisily from the house, and came under the cottonwoods to circle Hare and Mescal in welcome.

"Jack, you look done up," said Dave Naab solicitously, when the first greetings had been spoken, and Mother Ruth had led Mescal indoors. "Silvermane, too — he's wet and winded. He's been running?"

"Yes, a little," replied Hare, as he removed the saddle from the weary horse.

"Ah! What's this?" questioned August Naab, with his hand on Silvermane's flank. He rubbed his fingers over a raw, red welt, causing the stallion to flinch. "Hare, a bullet made that!"

"Yes."

"Then you didn't ride in by the Navajo crossing?"

"No. I came by Silver Cup."

"Silver Cup? How on earth did you get down there?"

"We climbed out of the cañon up over Coconina, and so made the spring."

Naab whistled his surprise, and he passed another keen glance over Hare and his horse. "Your story can wait. I know about what it is — after you reached Silver Cup. Come in, come in; Dave will have a care for the stallion."

But Hare would allow Dave or no one else to attend to Silvermane. That was his own work, his duty, his pleasure. He rubbed the tired gray, and gave him a drink at the trough, and led him to the corral, and took leave of him with a caress similar to Mescal's. Then he went to his room and bathed himself and changed his clothes, afterward presenting himself at the supper table to eat like one famished.

It did not take him long, nor was he surprised to discover that gloom pervaded the Naab household. Mescal and he ate alone, as they had been too late for the regular hour. The women folk waited upon them as if they could not do enough for them; pleasant words and smiles were not wanting; but, in spite of these manifestations, something somber

attended the meal. There was a shadow in each face, and each step was slow, and each voice subdued.

Naab and his sons were waiting for Hare when he entered the sitting room, and, after his entrance, the door was closed. They were all quiet and stern, especially the father. Never before had Hare so strongly felt the inflexibility of these men; nor had he ever felt their relationship to him as it seemed now.

"Tell us all," cried Naab simply.

While Hare was narrating his adventures, not a word or a move interrupted him till he got to where Silvermane ran Dene down.

"That's the second time!" rolled out Naab. "The stallion will kill him yet!"

Hare then concluded his story.

"What you owe to that great whirlwind of a horse!" exclaimed Dave Naab. No other comment on Hare or Silvermane was offered by the Naabs. "You knew Holderness had taken in Silver Cup?" inquired Hare.

August Naab nodded gloomily.

"I guess we knew it!" replied Dave for him. "While I was in White Sage, and the boys were here at home, Holderness rode to the spring and took possession. I called to see him on my way back, but he wasn't around. Snap was there, the boss of a bunch of riders. Dene, too, was there."

"Did you go right into camp?" asked Hare.

"Sure. I was looking for Holderness. There were eighteen or twenty riders in the bunch. I talked to several of them, Mormons, good fellows they used to be. Also had some words with Dene. He said: 'I shore was sorry Snap got to my spy first. I wanted him bad, and I'm shore goin' to have his white horse.' Snap and Dene, all of them, thought you were number thirty-one in dad's cemetery."

"Not yet," said Hare. "Dene certainly looked as if

he saw a ghost when Silvermane jumped and I yelled at him. Well, he's at Silver Cup. They're all there. What's to be done about it? They're openly thieves. The new brand on all your stock proves that."

"Such a trick we never heard of," replied August Naab. "If we had, we might have spared ourselves the labor of branding the stock."

"But that new brand of Holderness' upon yours proves his guilt."

"It's not now a question of proof. It's one of might, of possession. Holderness has stolen my water and my stock."

"They are worse than rustlers; firing on Mescal and me proves that."

"Why didn't you unlimber the long rifle?" interposed Dave curiously.

"I got it full of water and sand. That reminds me I must be about cleaning it. I never thought of shooting back. Silvermane was running too fast."

"Hare, you can see I am in the most serious position of my life," said August Naab. "My sons have persuaded me that I was pushed off my ranges too easily, without resisting. I've come to believe Martin Cole; certainly, his prophecy has come true. Dave brought news from White Sage, and it's almost unbelievable. Holderness has proclaimed himself, or has actually got himself elected sheriff; he holds office over the Mormons, from whom he steals. Scarcely a day goes by in the village without a killing. The Mormons north of Lund finally banded together and hanged some rustlers, and drove the others out. Many of them have come down into our country, and Holderness now has a strong force. But the Mormons will rise against him. We are God-fearing, life-loving men, slow to wrath. But—"

The deep rolling burr in his voice denoted emotion that denied him words.

"They need a leader," replied Hare sharply.

August Naab rose with haggard face, and his eyes had the look of a man accused.

"Dad figures this way," put in Dave. "On the one hand, we lose our water and stock without bloodshed. We have a living in the oasis. There's little here to attract rustlers, so we may live in peace if we give up our rights. On the other hand, suppose dad gets the Navajos down here, and we join them and go after Holderness and his gang. There's going to be an all-fired, bloody fight. Of course, we'd wipe out the rustlers, but some of us would get killed — and there are the wives and kids. See!"

The force of August Naab's argument for peace, entirely aside from his Christian repugnance to the shedding of blood, was plainly unassailable.

"Remember what Snap said?" queried Hare suddenly. "One man to kill Dene! Therefore, one man to kill Holderness! That would break the power of this band."

"Ah, you've said it!" replied Dave, raising a taut arm. "It's a one-man job. Damn Snap! He could have done it, if he had not gone to the bad. But it won't be easy. I tried to get Holderness. He was wise, and his men politely said they had enjoyed my call, but I wasn't to come again."

"One man to kill Holderness!" repeated Hare.

August Naab cast at the speaker one of his far-seeing glances; and then he shook himself, wrestled with himself, as if to throw off the grip of something hard and inevitable. "I'm still master here," he said, and his voice showed the subdual of his passions. "I give up Silver Cup and my stock. Maybe that will content Holderness."

Some days went by at the oasis pleasantly for Hare, as he rested from his long exertions. Naab's former

cheer and that of his family reasserted itself, once the decision was made, and the daily life went on as usual. The sons worked in the fields by day, and in the evening played at pitching horseshoes on the bare circle where the children romped. The women went on baking, sewing, and singing. August Naab's prayers were more fervent than ever, and he even prayed for the soul of the man who had robbed him.

Mescal's cheeks soon rounded out to their old contour, and her eyes shone with shyer, happier light than Hare had ever seen there. The races between Silvermane and Black Bolly were renewed on the long stretch under the wall, and Mescal forgot that she had once acknowledged the superiority of the gray. The cottonwoods showered silken floss till the cabins and grass were white; the birds returned to the oasis; the sun kissed warm color into the cherries, and the river boomed its dreamy hum.

"Here, Jack," said August Naab, one morning, "get a spade and come with me. There's a break somewhere in the ditch."

Hare went with him, out along the fence, by the alfalfa fields and round the corner of red wall toward the irrigating dam.

"Well, Jack, I suppose you'll be asking me for Mescal one of these days," said Naab.

"Yes," replied Hare.

"There's a little story to tell you about Mescal, when the day comes."

"Tell it, now."

"No. Not yet. I'm glad you found her. I never knew her to be so happy, not even when she was a child. Then, somehow, there's a better feeling between her and my womenfolk. The old antagonism toward Mescal is gone. Well, well, life is so. I pray that things

may turn out well for you and her. But I fear — I seem to see — Hare, I'm a poor man, once more. I can't do for you what I would like. Still, we'll see; we'll hope."

Thus he talked on, being in one of the moods when his thoughts flowed into speech; and Hare had again a glimpse into the bottomless well of this Mormon's kindness, where hope sprang eternally. His was a heart unembittered by sorrow for an outlawed son, nor was it open to hatred of evil men.

Work on the washed-out bank of the ditch had not progressed far, when Naab raised his head, as if listening.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked.

"No," replied Hare.

"The roar of the river is heavy here. Maybe I was mistaken. I thought I heard shots." Then he went on spading clay into the break, but he stopped every moment or so uneasily, as if he could not get rid of some perturbing thought. Suddenly, he let go of the spade, and lightning shot from his eyes.

"Judith! Judith! Here!" he called. Wheeling, with a premonition of calamity, Hare saw the girl running along the wall toward them. Her face was the hue of a corpse; she wrung her hands, and her cries rose above the roar of the river. Naab sprang toward her, and Hare ran at his heels.

"Father! Father!" she panted. "Come — quick — the rustlers — the rustlers! Snap! Dene! Oh, hurry! They've killed Dave — they've got Mescal!"

Death itself shuddered through Hare's veins, and then a raging flood of fire. He bounded forward, to be flung back by Naab's arm.

"Fool! Would you give up your life in mad haste? Go slowly. We'll slip through the fields, under the trees."

Sick and cold, Hare hurried by Naab's side, round the wall and into the alfalfa. There were moments when his legs bent under him; others when he could have run wildly, and then Judith's words inflamed in him a horrible lust to claw, to rend, to kill — transformed him into a tiger.

They got out of the fields, and advanced more cautiously into the grove. The screaming and wailing of women added certainty to doubt and dread.

"I see only the women — the children — no — there's a man — Zeke," said Hare, bending low to gaze under the branches.

"Go slow," muttered Naab.

"The rustlers rode off — after Mescal — she's gone!" panted Judith.

Hare was so mystified and torn by the possibility implied in the half-crazed girl's speech that he cast caution to the winds, and ran through the grove to dash into the glade. Naab's heavy steps thudded behind him.

In the corner of the porch, scared and stupefied children huddled in a heap. George and Billy bent over Dave, who sat white-faced against the steps, and through the fingers which he pressed to his breast oozed blood. Zeke was endeavoring to pacify the women.

"Dave! Dave! cried Hare. "You're not hard hit? Don't say it!"

"Hard hit — Jack — old fellow," replied Dave, with a pale smile. Through his white, clammy skin showed brown freckles that Hare had never seen before.

"My son! My son!" groaned August Naab, after one look at him.

"Dad — I got Chance and Culver — there they lie in the road — not bungled, either!"

Hare saw the inert, limp forms of two men lying

near the gate; one rested on his face, arm outstretched, with a Colt gripped in stiff hand; the other on his back, his spurs deep in the ground, as if he had dug them there with his last stretch.

August Naab and Zeke carried the injured man into the house. The women and children followed; and Hare, with Billy and George, entered last.

"Dad — I'm shot clean through — low down," said Dave, as they laid him on a couch. "It's just as well I — as any one — somebody had to — start this fight."

Naab got the children and the girls out of the room; the women were silent, now, except Dave's wife, who clung to him with low moans; he smiled upon all with a quick, intent smile; then he held out a hand to Hare.

"Jack, we got — to be — good friends. Don't forget — that — when you meet — Holderness. He shot me — from behind Chance and Culver — and after I fell — I killed them both — trying to get him. You — won't hang up — your gun — again — will you?"

Hare wrung the cold hand, clasping his so feebly. "No, Dave, no." Then he fled from the room. For an hour, he stood on the porch, waiting in dumb misery. George and Zeke came noiselessly out, followed by their father.

"It's all over, Hare." Another tragedy had passed by this man of the desert, and left his strength unshaken, but his deadly quiet and the iron-set gloom of his face were more terrible to see than any grief.

"Father, and you, Hare, come out into the road," said George.

Another motionless form lay beyond Chance and Culver. It was that of a slight man, flat on his back, arms wide, long, black hair in the dust. Under the white, level brow, the face had been crushed in a bloody curve.

"Dene!" burst from Hare, in a whisper.

"Killed by a horse!" exclaimed August Naab. "Ah! What horse?"

"Silvermane," replied George.

"Who rode my horse — tell me — quick!" demanded Hare, in a frenzy.

"It was Mescal. Listen! Let me tell you how it all happened. I was out at the forge when I heard a bunch of horses coming up the lane. I wasn't packing my gun, but I ran, anyway. When I got to the house, there was Dave facing Snap, Dene, and a bunch of rustlers. I saw Chance, at first, but not Holderness. There must have been twenty men."

"I came after Mescal, that's what," Snap was saying.

"'You can't have her,' was Dave's reply.

"We'll shore take her, an' we want Silvermane, too," said Dene.

"So you're a horse thief, as well as a rustler?" asked Dave.

"Naab, I ain't in any mind to fool. Snap wants the girl, an' I want Silvermane, an' that spy that come back to life."

"Then Holderness spoke from the back of the crowd. 'Naab, hurry, if you don't want the house burned!'

Dave drew, and Holderness fired from behind the men. Dave fell, raised up, and shot Chance and Culver; then dropped his gun.

"With that, the women in the house began to scream, and Mescal ran out, saying she'd go with Snap if they'd do no more harm.

"All right," said Snap; "get a horse; hurry — hurry!"

"Then Dene dismounted, and went toward the corral, saying: 'I shore want Silvermane.'

Mescal reached the gate ahead of Dene. "Let me get Silvermane. He's wild; he doesn't know you; he'll kick you if you go near him."

"She dropped the bars, and went up to the horse. He was rearing and snorting. She coaxed him down, and then stepped up on the fence to untie him. When she had untied him, she leaped off the fence to his back, screaming, as she hit him with the halter. Silvermane jumped with a wild snort, and in three jumps he was going like a bullet. Dene tried to check him, was knocked twenty feet. He was raising up when the stallion ran over him. He never moved again. Once in the lane, Silvermane got going — how he did run! Mescal hung low over his neck, like an Indian. He was gone in a cloud of dust before Snap and the rustlers knew what had happened. Snap came to, first, and, shrieking and waving his gun, spurred his pinto down the lane. The rest of the rustlers galloped after him."

August Naab placed a sympathetic hand on Hare's shaking shoulder.

"You see, lad, things are never so bad as they seem at first. Snap might as well try to catch a bird as Silvermane."

XVIII

THE HERITAGE OF THE DESERT

"Mescal's far out in front by this time. Depend on it, Hare," said Naab. "That trick was the cunning Indian of her. She'll ride Silvermane into White Sage to-morrow night. Then she'll hide from Snap. The bishop will hide her. Mormons have hidden girls before."

Thus August Naab stripped from Hare unbearable fears.

"As for seeking her — wait!" he continued. "For the present she'll be safe in White Sage. We must bury these men. To-morrow — my son. Then — "

"What then?" Hare straightened up.

Unutterable pain darkened the clear gray flame in the Mormon's gaze. For an instant his face worked spasmodically, to stiffen into a stony mask. Once more the old spiritual war had waged in his mind, to fall at last before primal instinct.

"The time has come!" said George Naab.

"Yes," replied his father harshly.

A great cold calm settled over Hare; his blood ceased to race, his mind to riot; in August Naab's one momentous word he knew the old man had found himself. It signified that this desert demanded more of men than self-defense. It taught its wild creatures and its men to strike first, or to slink away into the shadows, always lean, always hopeless until a stronger will ended life.

"Zeke, hitch up a team," said August Naab. "No —

wait a moment. Here comes Piute. Let's hear what he has to say."

Piute appeared on the zigzag cliff trail, driving a burro down at dangerous speed.

"He's sighted Silvermane and the rustlers," suggested George, as the shepherd approached.

Naab translated the excited Indian's mingling of Navajo and Piute languages to mean just what George had said, with more added: "Snap ahead of riders — Silvermane far, far ahead of Snap — running fast!"

"Mescal's pushing him hard to make the sand strip," said George.

"Piute — three fires to-night — Lookout Point!" This order meant the execution of August Naab's hurry signal for the Navajos, and, after he gave it, he waved the Indian toward the cliff, and lapsed into a silence which no one dared to break.

Naab consigned the bodies of the rustlers to the famous cemetery under the red wall. He laid Dene in grave thirty-one, which number the outlaw had so facetiously designated as the last resting place of Dene's spy. Chance and Culver he buried together. It was noteworthy that no Mormon rites were conferred on Culver, once a Mormon in good standing; nor were any prayers spoken over the open graves.

What did August Naab intend to do? That was the question in Hare's mind as he left the quiet house. It was a silent day, warm as summer, though the sun was overcast with gray clouds; the birds were still in the trees; there was no bray of burro or clarion call of peacock, even the hum of the river rested in silence.

Hare wandered over the farm and down the red lane, meditating on the question. Naab's few words had been pregnant with meaning; the cold gloom, so foreign to his nature, had been even more impressive; the order to signal for his Navajo friends was all-

menacing. His had been the revolt of the meek. The gentle, the loving, the administering, the spiritual uses of his life had failed.

In that moment, thinking of Naab's tragical life with its loss of son after son to violent ends, his first-born and best-loved to outlawry, it seemed to Hare that the Mormon had been blind in his fanatical religion to expect any less from the desert. The man's whole life had been a striving for the ideal under conditions in which he could not have survived a year but for his wonderful prowess. Yet he had gone on hoping, praying, believing.

The change in Hare, which he now saw in a light of sharpened intelligence, in a clarifying perspective, like the clearing of a dust cloud from a stretch he had to cross, he attributed to what he had seen, and suffered, and lived, on this desert. It was as if he had been there all his life; he had to think hard to remember his old self, as dead almost as if he had never awakened on the White Sage trail to August Naab's cheery call.

What the desert had done to him was what it meant; it had to engender in him its elements to fight, to resist, to survive. If he, a stranger of a few years, had to be molded in the flaming furnace of its fiery life, what must be the cast of August Naab, born on the desert, sleeping five nights out of seven on the sands for sixty years?

The desert! Hare trembled as he grasped all its meaning. There were the measureless distances to narrow the eye and teach restraint; the untrodden trails, the shifting sands, the thorny brakes, the broken lava to drag and pierce the flesh; the heights and depths, unscalable and unplumbed, to meet the greatest effort with eventful defeat. And over them all flamed the sun, red and burning.

The parched plants of the desert fought for life,

growing far apart, sending enormous roots deep to pierce the sand and split the rock for moisture, arming every leaf with a barbed thorn or poisoned sap, never thriving and ever thirsting.

The creatures of the desert endured the sun and lived without water, and were at endless war. The hawk had a keener eye than his fellow of more fruitful lands, and a crueler beak and greater spread of wings and sharper claws of deeper curve. Because there was little for him to eat — a rabbit now, a rock rat then — nature made his swoop like lightning, and he never missed his aim. The gaunt wolf never failed in his sure scent, in his silent stalk. The lizard flicked an invisible tongue into the heart of a flower; and the bee he caught stung with a poisoned sting. The battle of life went to the strong.

So the desert trained each individual member of its wild denizens to survive. No eye of the desert but burned with the flame of the sun! To kill or to escape death — that was the dominant motive. To fight barrenness and heat — that was stern enough, but each creature must fight his fellow.

What then of the men who drifted into the desert, and who survived? They must of necessity endure the wind and heat, the drouth and famine; they must grow lean and hard, keen-eyed and silent. The weak, the humble, the sacrificing must be winnowed from among them. As each man developed, he took some aspect of the desert. Holderness, the amber clearness of its distances in his eyes, its deceit in his soul; August Naab, the magnificence of the desert pine in his giant form, its strength in his heart; Snap Naab, the hawk-beak cast of his face, its cruelty in his nature. But all shared alike in the common element of survival — ferocity. August Naab had subdued his to the promptings of a Christlike spirit; yet did not his

very energy, his wonderful tirelessness, and implacable will to achieve, his power to resist, partake of that fierceness? Moreover, after many struggles, he had been overcome by the desert's call for blood. The mystery of him was no longer a mystery; always in those moments of revelation in which he claimed not to believe, he had seen himself as faithful in the end to the desert.

Hare's slumbers that night were broken and dreamful. He dreamed of a great gray horse leaping in the sky from cloud to cloud with the lightning and the thunder under his hoofs; the storm winds sweeping from his silver mane. He dreamed of Mescal's brooding eyes, and they were dark gateways of the desert open only to him, and he entered to chase the alluring stars deep into the purple distance. He dreamed of himself waiting in serene confidence for some unknown thing to pass.

He awakened late in the morning and found the house hushed. The day wore on in a repose unstirred by breeze or sound, in accord with the mourning of August Naab. At noon a solemn procession wended its slow course to the shadow of the red cliff, and as solemnly returned.

Then a single, long-drawn, piercing Indian whoop broke the midday lull. It heralded the approach of the Navajos. Single file they rode up the lane, and when the falcon-eyed Eschtah dismounted in the dignity of his war bonnet before his white friend, the line of his warriors still turned the corner of the red wall. Next to the chieftain rode Scarbreast, the grim war lord of the Navajos. His painted and plumed followers trailed into the grove. Their sinewy, bronze bodies, almost naked, glistened wet from the river. Full a hundred strong were they, a silent, lean-limbed desert troop.

"The White Prophet's fires burned bright," said the chieftain. "Eschtah is here."

"The Navajo is a friend," replied Naab. "The white man needs counsel and help. He has fallen upon evil days."

"Eschtah is old and wise. He sees war in the eyes of his friend."

"War, chief, war! Let the Navajo and his warriors rest and eat. Then we shall speak."

A single command from the Navajo broke the waiting files of warriors. Mustangs were loosened into the fields, packs were unstrapped from the burros, blankets spread under the cottonwoods. When the afternoon waned and the shade from the western wall crept into the oasis, August Naab came from his cabin, clad in buckskins, with a large blue Colt swinging handle outward from his left hip. He ordered his sons to replenish the fire that had been built in the circle, and when the dark, shining-eyed Indians had squatted round the blaze he called to his women to bring meat and drink.

Hare's unnatural calmness had prevailed until he saw Naab stride out in front of the waiting Indians. Then a ripple of cold passed over him. He leaned against a tree in the shadow and watched the gray-faced giant stalking to and fro before his red-skinned friends. A long while he strode in the circle of light, to pause at length before the chieftains and to roll the deep spurr of his voice into the impressive silence:

"Eschtah sees before him a friend stung to his heart. Men of his own color have for years injured him, yet have lived. The Mormon loved his fellows and forgave. Five sons he laid in their graves, yet his heart was not hardened. His first-born went the trail of the fire-water and is an outcast from his people, and the white man bowed his head. Many enemies has he, and one is a chief. He has killed the white man's

friends, stolen his cattle and his water. To-day the white man laid another son in his grave. What thinks the chief? Would he not crush the scorpion that stung him?"

"Eschtah respects his friend, but he had not thought well of his wisdom. The White Prophet sees visions of things to come, but his blood is cold. He asks too much of the white man's God. He is a chief; he has an eye like the lightning, an arm strong as the pine, yet he has not struck. Eschtah grieves. He does not counsel the spilling of blood for its own sake. The Navajo's father and his father's father bathed the desert in red blood, and he himself has shed blood, red and white, but it was to save his sheep, his water, his corn, that the Navajo children might not starve. Eschtah's friend has let too many selfish men of his race cross his range and drink at his springs. They drive his cattle and take the meat from his children's mouths. Only a few can live on the desert. Let him who has found the springs and the trails keep them for his own. Let him who came too late go away to find for himself, to prove himself a warrior, or let his bones whiten in the sand. The Navajo counsels his white friend to kill."

"The great Eschtah speaks wise words. The White Prophet is richer for them. He will lay aside the prayers to his unseeing God, and will seek his foe."

"It is well."

"The white man's foe is strong; he is surrounded by many men; they will fight. If Eschtah sends his braves with his friend, there will be war. Many braves will fall. The White Prophet wishes to save them, if he can. He will go forth alone to kill his foe. If the sun sets four times and the white man is not here, then Eschtah will send his great war chief and his warriors. They will kill whom they find at the white man's springs. And thereafter half of all the white

man's cattle that were stolen shall be Eschtah's so that he watch over the water and range."

"Eschtah greets a great chief. The White Prophet knows he will kill his enemy, but he is not sure he will return. He is not sure that the little braves of his foe will fly like the winds, yet he hopes. So he holds the Navajo back to the last. Eschtah will watch the sun set four times. If his white friend returns, he will rejoice. If he does not return, the Navajo will send his warriors on the trail. He will send the white man's sons so that his chief may know whom to kill. For Eschtah will never rest till his friend's foes are dead or driven from the desert. Blood will soak the sands. While Eschtah lives and his sons live they will mourn for the White Prophet and herd his cattle and ever stand in the gateway of the red cliffs."

August Naab walked swiftly from the circle of light into the darkness; his heavy steps sounded on the porch and in the hallway. His three sons went toward their cabins with bowed heads and silent tongues. Eschtah folded his blanket about him and stalked off into the gloom of the grove, and his warriors, with soft, shuffling, moccasined steps, walked out of the glow of the firelight, to fade into the night.

Hare remained in the shadow of the cottonwood where he had stood unnoticed. He had not moved a muscle since he had heard August Naab's declaration. That one word of Naab's intention, "Alone!" had been the lightning stroke to smite Hare rigid in his tracks. For it had struck into his heart and his mind. It had paralyzed him with the revelation it brought; for Hare knew as he had never known anything before in his life, that he would forestall August Naab, avenge the death of Dave, kill the rustler Holderness.

The strange calm that had obsessed him had waited

for this, this maelstrom within his breast, this contending tide of emotion. He clung to the tree, clenching rough bark, while the storm raged. Wave on wave, beat on beat, the race of hot blood slowly stilled and receded and cooled. Beads of cold sweat dampened his brow; his hands were wet. Strangely he divined that such a gust of passion would never again torture his physical being and shake the very foundations of his soul. It was the terrible and last convulsion of opposition to the law that leveled life in death. Through blinding shock he passed to agony and slowly into cold acceptance of his heritage of the desert.

The two long years of his desert training were as an open page to the unveiled eye of Hare's mind. The life he owed to August Naab, the strength built up by the old man's knowledge of the healing power of plateau and range — these lay in a long curve between the day Naab had lifted him out of the White Sage trail and this day of the Mormon's extremity.

A long curve, with Holderness' insulting blow at the beginning, his murder of a beloved friend at the end! For Hare remembered the blow, and never would he forget Dave's last words. Yet, unforgettable as these were, it was duty rather than revenge that called him. This was August Naab's great hour of need. Hare knew himself to be the tool of inscrutable fate; he was the one to fight the old, desert-scarred Mormon's battle.

Softly Hare slipped into his rooms, and, putting on coat and belt and catching up his rifle, stole out again stealthily, like an Indian. In the darkness of the wagon shed he felt for his saddle, and, finding it, groped with eager hands for the grain box. Raising the lid, he filled a measure with grain, and emptied it into his saddlebag. He carried the saddle out of the yard, through the gate and across the lane to the corrals.

The wilder mustangs in the far corral began to

pound the stones, to kick and snort; and those in the corral where Black Bolly was kept trooped noisily to the bars. Bolly whinnied and stuck her black muzzle over the fence. Hare placed a caressing hand on her, while he waited, listening and watching. It was not an unusual circumstance for the mustangs to get restless at any time during the night, and Hare had confidence that this one would pass without investigation.

Gradually the restless stampings and suspicious snortings ceased; and Hare letting down the bars, led Bolly out into the lane. It was the work of a moment to saddle her; his bridle hung where he always kept it, on the pommel, and with nimble fingers he shortened the several straps to fit Bolly's head, and slipped the bit between her teeth. Then he put up the bars of the gate.

Before mounting, he stood a moment thinking coolly, deliberately numbering the several necessities he must not forget — grain for Bolly, food for himself, his Colt and Winchester, cartridges, canteen, matches, knife. He inserted a hand into one of his saddlebags expecting to find some strips of meat. The bag was empty. He felt in the other one, and under the grain found what he sought. The canteen lay in the coil of his lasso tied to the saddle, and its heavy canvas covering was damp to his touch. With that he shoved the long Winchester into its saddle sheath and swung his leg over the mustang.

The house of the Naabs was dark and still. The dying council fire cast flickering shadows under the black cottonwoods where the Navajos slept. The faint breeze that rustled the leaves brought the low, sullen roar of the river.

Hare guided Bolly into the thick dust of the lane, laid the bridle loosely on her neck for her to choose the trail, and silently rode out into the lonely desert night.

XIX

UNLEASHED

Hare's listening breathlessness wore itself out in the slow, silent advance toward the gateway of the cliffs, and when he had passed the great round corner of wall he breathed once more with freedom. Spurring Bolly into a trot, he rode forward with a certain strange elation. He had slipped out of the oasis unseen, unheard. It would be morning before August Naab discovered his absence; perhaps longer before he divined his purpose. Then he would have a long start. He thrilled a little with something akin to fear when he pictured the old man's rage, and wondered what change it would make in his plan.

The strip of sand under the Blue Star had to be crossed at night — a feat which even the Navajos did not have to their credit. Yet Hare had no shrinking; he had no doubt. As he had been drawn to the Painted Desert by a distant, voiceless call, so now he was pushed forward by something nameless, a something made up of gleams from Mescal's eyes, from Naab's altered face, from remembered words of paling lips, from wails of women, from the silent sound of dead men turning in their graves.

The windy blackness was like that of a huge dim hall with a current of air. The night had turned cold, the stars had brightened icily, the rumble of the river had died away when Bolly's clicking trot suddenly

changed to a noiseless, floundering walk. She had come upon the sand.

Hare located the Blue Star in the cliff, and once more loosed the rein on Bolly's neck. She stopped and champed her bit and turned her black head to him as if to say she wanted the guidance of a sure arm. But as it was not forthcoming, she stepped onward into the yielding sand.

With hands resting idly on the pommel, Hare sat at ease in the saddle. The billowy dunes reflected the pale starlight and waved away from him, to darken in obscurity. As long as the Blue Star remained in sight, he kept his sense of direction; when it had disappeared, he felt himself lost. Bolly's course appeared as crooked as the jagged, peaked outline of the cliffs. She climbed straight up little knolls, descended them at an angle, turned sharply at wind-washed gullies, made long, winding detours, zigzagged levels that shone like a polished floor; and at last it seemed to Hare she had doubled back on her trail.

The black cliff receded over the waves of sand; the stars changed positions, traveled round in the blue dome, and the few that he knew finally sank below the horizon.

Bolly never lagged; she was like the homeward-bound horse, indifferent to direction because sure of it, eager to finish the journey because now it was short. Hare was glad, though not surprised, when she snorted and cracked her iron-shod hoof on a stone at the edge of the sand. He smiled with tightening lips when he rode into the shadow of a rock that he recognized. Bolly had crossed the treacherous belt of dunes and washes, to strike the trail on the other side.

The long level of wind-carved rocks under the cliffs, the hummocky ridges of ribbed desert, the miles of slow ascent up to the scaly divide, the gradual

descent to the cedars — these stretches of his journey took the night hours and brought the brightening gray in the east.

Within a mile of Silver Cup Spring Hare dismounted, to tie folded pads of buckskin on Bolly's hoofs. Having thus muffled her shoes, he cautiously advanced on the trail for the matter of a hundred rods or more, then sheered off to the right into the cedars. He led Bolly slowly, without cracking a stone or snapping a twig, and stopped every few paces to listen. There was no sound other than the wind in the cedars. Presently he caught the dull red gleam of a burned-out camp fire, and took his breath with a sharp rush. Thereafter his movements became as guarded, as surely without noise, as those of a spying Indian. The dawn broke over the red wall as he gained the trail beyond the spring.

He rimmed the curve of the valley and led Bolly a little way up the wooded slope to a dense thicket of aspens in a hollow. This thicket encircled a patch of long grass. Hare pressed the lithe aspens aside to admit Bolly, and left her there free. He drew his rifle from its sheath and, assuring himself that the mustang could not be seen or heard from below, he bent his steps diagonally up the slope.

Every foot of this ground he knew, and he climbed swiftly until he struck the mountain trail, went down that for some rods, and then stepped off into the cedars. He reached a point directly above the cliff camp where he had spent so many days, and this he knew overhung the cabin built by Holderness. He stole down from tree to tree, and slipped from thicket to thicket. The sun, red as blood, raised a bright crescent over the red wall; the soft, streaky mists of the valley began to color and move; cattle were working in toward the spring.

Never brushing a branch, never dislodging a stone, Hare descended the slope, his eyes keener, his ears sharper for every step. Soon the flat rim of gray stone shut out the lower level of cedars. While resting he listened. Then he marked his course down the last bit of slanting ground to the cliff bench that faced the valley. This space was open, rough with crumbling rock and dead cedar brush — a difficult place to cross without sound. Deliberate in choice of steps, very slow in execution of them, Hare proceeded with a stealth that satisfied even his intent ear.

When the wide gray strip of stone edged into the focus of his downcast, fixed eye, he sank to the ground with a slight trembling in all his limbs. There was a thick brush on the edge of the cliff; in three steps he could reach it and, unseen himself, look down upon the camp.

A little cloud of smoke rose lazily and trailed a slender column of blue. Sounds wafted softly upward, the low voices of men in conversation, and a merry whistle, and then the humming of a tune. Hare's mouth was dry and his temples throbbed as he asked himself what now was to be the manner of his procedure. The answer came from the moment, yet seemed to have been long waiting:

‘I’ll watch till Holderness walks out into sight, jump up with a yell when he comes, give him time to see me, to draw his gun — then kill him!’

Hare slipped to the bush, drew in a deep, long breath that stilled his agitation, and peeped over the cliff. The crude shingles of the cabin first rose into sight; then beyond he saw the corral, with a number of shaggy mustangs and a great gray horse. Hare stared blankly. As in a dream, he saw the proud arch of splendid neck, the graceful wave of white-crested mane.

"Silvermane!" he gasped suddenly. "They caught him — after all!"

He fell backward upon the cliff and lay there, with hands clutching his rifle, shudderingly conscious of a blow, trying to comprehend its meaning.

"Silvermane! They caught him — after all!" he kept repeating. Then in a flash of agonized understanding, he whispered: "Mescal! Mescal!"

Then he rolled upon his face, shutting out the blue sky; he bit the dust like a death-stricken wolf; his body strung out stiff as a bent spring released from its compress, and his nails indented the stock of his rifle. This rigidity softened to heaving muscular ripples that shook him from head to foot. Then he sat up, haggard, wild-eyed, brow dripping while a force stronger than fear and agony which had laid him low lifted him, propelled him from the ground, froze the personal human cry of pain.

Silvermane had been captured, most likely by rustlers waiting at the western edge of the sand strip; Mescal had fallen into the hands of Snap Naab. Incontrovertible facts not to be lessened by the pangs of a lover! But Mescal was surely alive. Silvermane was there to be freed and to carry her away. Snap was there to be killed; his long career of unrestrained cruelty was in its last day — these things, which Hare somehow knew, crushed down the weakness of surprise and shock. The stern deliberation of his intent to kill Holderness, the passion of his purpose to pay his debt to August Naab and the debts of many other desert drifters, were as nothing compared to the gathering might of this thing that now raised him.

Suddenly he felt free and strong as an untamed lion unleashed from long thrall.

From the cover of the bush he peered again over the cliff. The cabin, with its shut door facing him,

was scarcely two hundred feet down from where he lay hidden. One of the rustlers sang as he bent over the camp fire and raked the coals around the pots; others lounged on a bench waiting for breakfast; some rolled out on their blankets, stretched and yawned, and pulling on their boots made for the spring.

The last man to get up was Snap Naab, and he had slept with his head on the threshold of the door. To Hare the significance was that Snap had made Mescal a prisoner in the cabin, and no one could go in or out without stepping upon him.

How the cold shudder passed through Hare as he watched Naab! The rustler foreman of Holderness' company had slept with his belt containing two Colts; nor had he removed his boots. With what dark humor Hare noted these details! The tall Holderness, face shining, gold-red beard agleam, rounded the cabin whistling.

Hare watched the rustlers sit down to breakfast, and here and there caught a loud-spoken word and marked their leisurely, care-free manner. Snap Naab took up a pan of food and a cup of coffee, and carried them into the cabin, and came out, shutting the door.

After breakfast, most of the rustlers set themselves idly to tasks. Hare watched them with the eyes of a lynx watching deer. Several men were arranging articles for packing, and their actions were slow to the point of laziness; others trooped down toward the corral. Holderness rolled a cigarette and stooped over the camp fire to reach a burning stick. Snap Naab stalked to and fro before the door of the cabin. He alone of the rustler's band showed restlessness, and more than once glanced up the trail that led over the divide toward his father's oasis.

Holderness sent expectant glances in the other direction toward Seeping Springs. Once his clear voice rang out:

"I tell you, Naab, there's no hurry. We'll ride in to-morrow."

A thousand thoughts flitted through Hare's mind — a steady stream of questions, answers, speculations, conclusions. Why did Snap look anxiously along the oasis trail? It was not that he feared his father or his brothers alone; there was always the menace of the Navajos. Why was Holderness in no hurry to leave Silver Cup? Why did he lag at the spring when, if he expected riders from his ranch, he could have gone on to meet them, obviously saving time and putting greater distance between him and the men he had wronged? Was it utter fearlessness or only a deep-played game?

Holderness and his rustlers, all except the gloomy Naab, were blind to the peril that lay beyond the divide. How soon would August Naab strike out on the White Sage trail? Would he come alone? Whether he came alone or at the head of hard-riding Navajos, he would arrive too late. Holderness' life was not worth a pinch of the ashes he flecked so carelessly from his cigarette. Snap Naab's gloom, his long stride, his nervous hand always on or near the butt of his Colt, told of his keenness of desert instinct. For him the red sun had arisen red over the red wall.

While Hare watched and thought, the hours sped by; while Holderness lounged around and Snap kept silent guard and the rustlers smoked, slept, and moved about, the day waned, the shadow of the cliff crept over the cabin.

To Hare, the time had been as a moment; he was amazed to find that the sun had gone down behind Coconina. If August Naab had left the oasis at dawn,

he must now be near the divide, unless he had been delayed by a windstorm at the strip of sand. Hare longed to see the great roan charger come up over the divide; he longed to see a file of Navajos, plumes waving, dark lean mustangs gleaming in the red light, sweep down the stony ridge.

"If they come," he whispered, "I'll kill Holderness and Snap and any man who tries to open that cabin door."

So he waited in tense watchfulness, his gaze alternating between the wavy line of the divide and the camp glade. Out in the valley it was still clear daylight, but under the cliff twilight had fallen. All day Hare had strained his ears to hear the conversation of the rustlers; and it now occurred to him that if he would climb down through the split in the cliff to the little bench where Dave and George had always hidden to watch the spring, he would be right on top of the camp. This descent involved great risk, but as its accomplishment would enable to see the cabin door, when darkness set in he decided to venture.

The moment was propitious, for the rustlers were bustling around, cooking dinner, unrolling blankets, and moving to and fro from spring and corral. Hare crawled back a few yards and along the cliff until he reached the split. It was a narrow steep crack which he well remembered. Going down was attended with two dangers — losing his hold and rattling stones. Face foremost, he slipped downward with the gliding, sinuous movement of a snake, and reaching the grassy bench he lay quiet.

Jesting voices and loud laughter from below reassured him. He had not been heard. His position not only afforded every opportunity to see and hear, but also gave him means of rapid, noiseless retreat along the bench to the slope of cedars. Lying flat,

he crawled stealthily to the bushy fringe of the bench.

A bright fire blazed under the cliff. Men were moving and laughing. The cabin door was open. Mescal stood leaning back from Snap Naab, struggling to release her hands.

"Let me untie them, I say," growled Snap.

Mescal tore loose from him and stepped back. Her hands were bound before her, and twisting them outward, she warded him off. Her disheveled hair almost hid her dark eyes. They burned in level glance of hate and defiance. She was a little lioness, quivering with fiery life, fight in every line of her form.

"All right, don't eat, then — starve!" said Snap.

"I'll starve before I'll eat what you give me."

The rustlers laughed. Holderness blew out a great puff of smoke and smiled. Snap glowered upon Mescal and then upon his amiable companions. One of them, a ruddy-faced fellow, walked toward Mescal.

"Cool down, Snap, cool down," he said. "We're not goin' to stand for the girl starvin'. She ain't eat a bite yet. Here, miss, let me untie your hands — there. Say! Naab, damn you, her wrists are black and blue!"

"Look out! Your gun!" yelled Snap.

With a lithe, swift movement, Mescal snatched the man's Colt from its holster and was raising it when he grasped her arm. She winced and dropped the weapon.

"You little Indian devil!" he exclaimed, in a rapt admiration. "Sorry to hurt you, an' more'n sorry to spoil your aim. Thet wasn't kind to throw my own gun on me, jest after I'd played the gentleman, now, was it?"

"I didn't — intend — to shoot — you," panted Mescal.

"Naab, if this's your Mormon kind of wife — excuse me! Though I ain't denyin' she's the sassiest an' sweetest little cat I ever seen!"

"We Mormons don't talk about our women or hear any talk," returned Snap, with the dancing fury in his pale eyes. "You're from Nebraska?"

"Yep, jest a plain Nebraska rustler, cattle thief, an' all-round no-good customer, though I ain't taken to — houndin' women yet."

For answer Snap Naab's right hand slowly curved upward before him and stopped taut and inflexible while his strange eyes seemed to shoot sparks.

"See here, Naab, why do you want to throw a gun on me?" asked the rustler coolly. "Hevn't you shot enough of your friends yet? I reckon I've no right to interfere in your affairs. I was only protestin' friendly like, for the little lady. She's game, an' she's called your hand. An' it's not a straight hand. Thet's all, an' damn if I care whether you are a Mormon or not. I'll bet a hoss Holderness will back me up."

"Snap, he's right," put in Holderness smoothly. "You needn't be so blame touchy about Mescal. She's showed what little use she's got for you. If you must rope her around like you do a mustang, be easy about it. Let's have supper. Now, Mescal, you sit here on the bench and behave yourself. I don't want you shooting up my camp."

Snap turned sullenly aside while Holderness seated Mescal near the door and fetched her food and drink. The rustlers squatted round the camp fire, and conversation ceased in the business of the meal.

It had been a scene to rake Hare through the fiery coals of commingling emotions. Sudden strong joy at the sight of Mescal, wonderful sweet pride in her fighting spirit — these went side by side with gratitude to the Nebraska rustler, strange deepening insight into Holderness' game, unextinguishable white-hot hatred of Snap Naab. And binding all was an ever-mounting will to rescue Mescal, held in check by an inexorable

judgment to wait. So Hare waited in blind faith of the something to be, keeping ever in mind the last resort — the rifle he clutched with eager, hard hands.

While he waited, the darkness descended, the fire sent forth a brighter blaze, and the rustlers finished their supper. Mescal arose and stepped across the threshold of the cabin door.

"Hold on!" ordered Snap, as he approached with swift strides. "Stick out your hands!"

Some of the rustlers grumbled; others blurted out: "Aw, no, Snap, don't tie her up — no!"

"Who says no?" hissed the Mormon, with snapping teeth. As he wheeled upon them, his Colt seemed to leap forward, and suddenly quivered at arm's length, gleaming with the ruddy fire rays.

Holderness laughed in the muzzle of the weapon. "Go ahead, Snap, tie up your ladylove. What a tame little wife she's going to make you! Tie her up, but do it without hurting her."

The rustlers divided their acceptance of the leader's order between low growls and laughs. Snap turned to his task. Mescal stood in the doorway and shrinkingly extended her clasped hands.

In that instant, when her spirit clashed with physical aversion to being rudely handled, she had a subtle, appealing wild beauty which had its effect on the watching men. Holderness whirled to the fire with a look on his face that betrayed his game. Snap bound Mescal's hands securely, thrust her inside the cabin, and, hesitating for a long moment, finally shut the door.

Then the tension, instead of relaxing, stiffened into a tight, silent portent. The men round the camp fire waited as if at the heels of some encroaching event. Holderness suddenly showed he was ill at ease; he appeared to be expecting arrivals from the direction

of Seeping Springs. Snap Naab leaned against the side of the door, with his narrow gaze cunningly studying the rustlers before him. More than any other, he had caught a foreshadowing; like the desert hawk he typified, he could see afar. Suddenly he pressed back against the door, half opening it while he faced the men.

"Stop!" commanded Holderness. The change in his voice was as if it had come from another man. "You don't go in there!"

"I'm going to take the girl and ride to White Sage," replied Naab, in slow deliberation.

"Bah! You tried that excuse last night and I blocked you. Shut the door! Naab, there'll be something happening here in a minute."

"There's more going to happen than ever you think of, Holderness. I'd warn you, if you hadn't spoken that way to me. Don't interfere now, I'm going."

"Well, go ahead — but you won't take the girl!"

Snap Naab swung off the step, slamming the door behind him.

"So-ho!" he exclaimed, with the accent of certainty. "For that you've made me foreman, eh?" His claw-like hand moved almost imperceptibly upward, while his pale eyes strove to pierce the strength behind Holderness' effrontery.

The rustler chief had a trump card to play; that showed in his sardonic smile.

"Naab, you don't get the girl."

"Maybe you'll get her?" hissed Snap.

"I always intended to."

Surely never before had passion incited Snap Naab's hand to the speed of a darting bird. His Colt gleamed in the camp-fire light. Click! Click-click! The hammer fell upon empty chambers.

Holderness laughed sarcastically.

"That's where!" he cried. "Here's to Naab's trick with a gun — Bah!" And he shot his foreman through the heart.

Snap plunged upon his face. His hands beat the ground like the shuffling wings of a wounded partridge. His fingers gripped the dust, spread convulsively, straightened, and sank limp.

Holderness called through the door of the cabin: "Mescal, I've rid you of your would-be husband. Cheer up!" Then, pointing to the fallen man, he said to the nearest bystanders: "Some of you drag that out for the coyotes."

The first fellow who bent over Snap happened to be the Nebraska rustler, and he curiously opened the breech of the six-shooter he picked up. "No shells!" he said and pulled Snap's second Colt from his belt, and unbreeched that. "No shells!" He surveyed the group of grim men, not one of whom had any reply to his ejaculation. Holderness vented again his metallic laugh, and, turning to the cabin, he fastened the door with a lasso.

Hare changed his position and settled himself to watch and wait out the night. Every hour that Holderness and his men tarried at Silver Cup hastened their approaching fate. Hare's strange prescience of the fatality that overshadowed these men had received its first verification in the sudden taking off of Snap Naab. The deep-scheming Holderness, confident that his strong band was sure protection for him, sat and smoked and smiled beside the camp fire. He had not caught even a hint of Snap Naab's suggested warning. Yet somewhere out on the oasis trail rode a Mormon giant, a priest, who, once turned from the saving of life to the lust to kill, would be as immutable as death itself, a man more to be feared than any other in all that wild desert land.

Behind him waited a troop of Navajos, swift as eagles, merciless as wolves, desert warriors with the sun-heated blood of generations in their veins. Upon the cliff above Holderness, lay hidden the lover of Mescal, his presence here undreamed of.

As Hare waited and watched, with all his inner being cold, he felt pity for Holderness. How close was his doom! Twice, as the rustler chief had sauntered nearer to the cabin door, as if to enter, Hare had covered him with the rifle, waiting for the step upon the threshold that meant doom. But Holderness did not take the final step, and Hare's finger eased its pressure upon the trigger.

The night closed in black; the clouded sky gave forth no starlight; the wind rose and moaned through the cedars. One by one the rustlers rolled in their blankets and all dropped into slumber while the camp fire slowly burned down. The night hours wore on to the soft wail of breeze and the wild notes of far-off trailing coyotes.

Hare, watching sleeplessly, saw one of the prone figures stir. The man raised himself very cautiously and glanced about on his companions, and long at Holderness, who lay squarely in the dimming light. Then he softly lowered himself. Hare pondered over this suspicious action. What did the rustler mean? Presently he again lifted his head and turned it as if intently listening. His companions were motionless in deep-breathing sleep. Gently he slipped aside his blankets and began to rise. He was slow and guarded of movement; it took him long to stand erect. He stepped between the rustlers with stocking feet that were as skulking as an Indian's, and went toward the cabin door.

When he softly edged round the sleeping Holderness, turning to show his right hand low down with a

glinting dark six-shooter, Hare's quickly formed determination to kill the man before he reached the door sustained a sudden violent check. What a strange circumstance was this rustler's wonderfully silent movement from among his comrades, his passing by Holderness with his drawn weapon! Again doom hovered over the rustler chief. If he stirred! — Hare knew instantly that this softly stepping man was a Mormon; he was true to Snap Naab, to the woman pledged in his creed. He meant to free Mescal.

If ever Hare breathed a prayer it was then. What if one of the band awakened! As the rustler turned at the door, his dark face gleamed in the flickering light. He unwound the lasso and opened the door without sound.

Hare whispered: "If he goes in, she'll scream! That will wake Holderness — then I must shoot — I must!"

But the Mormon rustler who was not yet dead to honor added wisdom to his cunning and stealth.

"Hist!" he spoke softly into the cabin. "Hist!"

Mescal must have been awake; she must have divined instantly the meaning of that low whisper, for silently she appeared in the doorway, silently she held forth her bound hands. The man untied the bonds and pointed into the cedars toward the corral. Swift and soundless as a flitting shadow, Mescal vanished in the gloom. The Mormon stole with wary, unhurried steps back to his bed and rolled in his blankets.

Hare rose unsteadily, wavering in the hot grip of a moment that seemed to have but one issue — the killing of Holderness. Mescal would soon be upon Silvermane, far out on the White Sage trail, and this time there would be no sand strip to trap her. But Hare could not kill the rustler while he was sleeping; he could not awaken him without discovering to his men the escape of the girl.

The moment still waited. Hare stood there on the beach, gazing down on the blanketed Holderness, and his every muscle trembled, his breast quaked in the tremendous struggle it cost him to let this man live longer. It was all but impossible. Holderness would discover Mescal's absence soon and would pursue her with the relentlessness he had shown in all his deeds.

Why not kill him now, ending forever his power, and trust to chance for the rest? No — no! Hare flung the temptation from him. Ward off pursuit as long as possible, aid Mescal in every way to some safe hiding place, and then seek Holderness — that was the prudence, the foresight of a man who had learned how to wait.

Under the dark bulge of the upper cliff, Hare felt his way, made the cedar slope, the trail, and then he went swiftly down into the little hollow where he had left Bolly. The pitchy darkness of the forest hindered him, but he came at length to the edge of the aspen thicket, penetrated it, and, guided toward Bolly by a suspicious stamp and whinny, he found her and quieted her with a word. He rode down the hollow, out upon the level valley.

The clouds had broken somewhat, letting pale light down through rifts. All about him cattle were lying in a thick gloom. It was penetrable for only a few rods. The ground was like a cushion under Bolly's hoofs, giving forth no sound. The mustang threw up her head, causing Hare to peer into the night fog. Rapid thuds broke the silence; a vague gray shadow moved into the field of his vision. He saw Silvermane and called as loudly as he dared. The stallion melted into the misty curtain; the violent thud of hoofs softened and ceased. Hare spurred Bolly to her fleetest. He had a long, silent chase, but it was futile, and unnecessarily hard on the mustang; so he pulled her in to a trot.

Hare kept Bolly to his gait the remainder of the night, and when the eastern sky lightened he found the trail and reached Seeping Springs at dawn. Silvermane's tracks were deep in the clay at the drinking trough. He rested a few moments, let Bolly have sparingly of grain and water, and once more took to the trail.

From the ridge below the spring, he descried Silvermane miles ahead of him out on the valley. This day seemed shorter than the foregoing one; it passed while he watched Silvermane grow smaller and smaller and disappear on the looming slope of Coconina. Hare's fear that Mescal would run into the riders Holderness expected from his ranch grew less and less after she had reached the cover of the cedars. That she would rest the stallion at the Navajo pool on the mountain he made certain. Later in the night he got to the camping spot and found no trace to prove that she had halted there, even to let Silvermane drink. So he tied the tired mustang and slept until daylight.

He crossed the plateau and began the descent. Before he was halfway down, the warm, bright sun cleared the valley of vapor and shadow. Far along on the winding white trail shone a speck. It was Silvermane almost out of sight.

"Ten miles — fifteen or more," said Hare. "Mescal will soon be in the village."

Again hours of travel flew by as winged moments. Thoughts of time, distance, monotony, fatigue, purpose were excluded from his mind. A rushing, kaleidoscope dance of images filled his consciousness, but they were all of Mescal. Safety for her had liberated happiness.

It was near sundown when he rode Black Bolly into White Sage, and took the back road and the pasture lane to Bishop Caldwell's cottage. John, one

of the bishop's sons, was in the barnyard and ran to open the gate.

"Mescal!" cried Hare.

"Safe," replied the Mormon.

"Have you hidden her?"

"Yes."

"She's in a secret cave, a Mormon hiding place for women. Only a few men know of its existence. Rest easy, for she's absolutely safe."

"Thank God! then, that's settled." Hare drew a long breath.

"Mescal told us what happened — how she got caught at the sand strip and escaped from Holderness at Silver Cup. Was Dene hurt?"

"Silvermane killed him."

"How things come about! I saw you run Dene down that time here in White Sage. It must have been written. Did Holderness shoot Snap Naab?"

"Yes."

"What of old Naab? Won't he come down here now to lead us Mormons against the rustlers?"

"He called the Navajos across the river. He meant to take the trail alone and kill Holderness, keeping the Indians back four days. If he failed to return, they were to ride out on the rustlers. But his plan must be changed, for I came ahead of him."

"For what? Mescal?"

"No. For Holderness."

"You'll kill him!"

"I will."

"He'll be coming soon? When?"

"To-morrow, possibly by daylight. He wants Mescal. There's a chance Naab may have reached Silver Cup before Holderness left, but I doubt it."

"May I know your plan?" The Mormon hesitated

while his strong brown face flashed with daring inspiration. "I — I've a good reason."

"Plan? Yes. Hide Bolly and Silvermane in the little arbor down in the orchard. I'll stay outside to-night, sleep a little — for I'm dead tired — and watch in the morning. Holderness will come here with his men, perhaps not openly at first, to drag Mescal away. He'll mean to use strategy. I'll meet him when he comes — that's all."

"It's well. I ask you not to mention this to my father. Come in now. You need food and rest. Later I'll hide Bolly and Silvermane in the arbor."

Hare met the bishop and his family with composure, but his advent, following so closely upon Mescal's, increased the agitation under which they were laboring. They seemed repelled, yet fascinated, by his face. Hare ate in silence. John Caldwell did not come in to supper; his brothers mysteriously left the table before finishing the meal. A subdued murmur of voices wafted in at the open window.

Darkness found Hare wrapped in a blanket under the trees. He needed sleep that would loose the strange deadlock of his thoughts, clear the blur from his eyes, ease the pain in his head and the weariness in his limbs — all these weaknesses of which he had suddenly become conscious.

Time and again he had almost wooed slumber to him when soft footsteps on the gravel paths, low voices, steps on the porch, whisperings, the gentle closing of the gate brought him back to the unreal, listening wakefulness. The sounds continued late into the night, and when he did fall asleep he dreamed of them.

He awoke to a dawn clearer than the light from the noonday sun. He seemed to feel the piercing power of his eyes. In his ears was the ringing of a bell. He could

not stand still, and his movements were subtle and swift. His hands took a peculiar, tenacious hold of everything he chanced to touch. He paced his hidden walk behind the arbor, at every turn taking sharp glances up and down the road. Thoughts came to him clearly, yet in submission to an obsessing one.

The morning was strangely quiet, the goings-on of the little village were strangely absent, the sons of the bishop had strangely disappeared — these perceptions were realized through a great crowding sense of imminent catastrophe.

A band of horsemen, closely grouped, turned into the road and trotted their horses forward. Some of the men wore black masks. Holderness rode at the front, his red-gold beard shining in the sunlight. Steady clip-clop of hoofs and clinking of iron stirrups broke the morning quiet. Holderness, with two of his men, dismounted before the bishop's gate; the others of the band trotted on down the road. The ring of Holderness' laugh preceded the snap of the gate latch.

Hare now stood calm and cold behind his green covert watching the three men stroll up the garden path. Holderness removed a cigarette from his lips as he neared the porch and blew rings of white smoke. Bishop Caldwell tottered out of the cottage, rapping the porch floor with his cane.

"Good morning, bishop" greeted Holderness blandly, baring his head.

"To you, sir," quavered the old man, with his wavering blue eyes fixed on the spurred, booted, belted rustler.

Holderness stepped out in front of his companions, a superb man, smiling, at ease, with something courteous softening his sure boldness.

"I rode in to —"

Hare leaped from his hiding place.

"Holderness!"

The rustler pivoted on whirling heels.

"Dene's spy!" he exclaimed, aghast. Lightning-swift changes swept his mobile features. Fear had risen before he faced his foe, then came amaze with recognition, a glint of amusement, dark anger, shock, and the terrible instinct of death in this meeting.

"Naab's trick!" hissed Hare, with hand high. The suggestion in his words, the meaning in his look, held the three rustlers transfixed. The surprise was his strength.

In Holderness' amber eyes shone his desperate calculation of chances. Hare's fateful glance, impossible to elude, his strung form slightly crouched, his cold waiting deliberate mention of August Naab's trick with a gun, and particularly the poise of the quivering hand, drove the rustler into a terror that racked his lofty form as might have a convulsion. He had been bidden to draw, and he could not summon the force.

"Naab's trick!" repeated Hare mockingly.

Suddenly Holderness wrestled shoulder and arm into rapid action.

Hare's hand flashed like a white steak. Gleam of blue — spurt of red — crash!

Holderness swayed, with blond head swinging backward; the amber of his eyes suddenly darkened; the life in them glazed; like a log he fell, clutching the weapon he had half drawn.

XX

THE RAGE OF THE OLD LION

"Take Holderness away — quick!" ordered Hare. A tiny, thin curl of blue smoke floated from the muzzle of his extended weapon.

The rustlers jerked out of their statue-like immobility, and lifting their dead leader dragged him down the garden path, his spurs clinking on the gravel and plowing little furrows.

"Bishop, go in now. They may return," said Hare, hurrying up the steps to place his arm around the tottering old man.

"Was that Holderness?"

"Yes," replied Hare.

"The deeds of the wicked return unto them! God's will!"

Hare led the bishop indoors. The sitting room was full of wailing women and crying children. None of the young men were present. Again Hare made note of their inexplicable absence. He spoke soothingly to the frightened family. The little boys and girls yielded readily to his persuasion, but the women took no heed of him.

"Where are your sons?" asked Hare.

"I don't know," replied the bishop. "They should be here to stand by you. It's strange. I don't understand. Last night my sons were visited by many men, coming and going in twos and threes till late. They didn't sleep in their beds. I know not what to think."

Hare remembered John Caldwell's inspired face.

"Have the rustlers really come?" asked a young woman, whose eyes were red and cheeks tear-stained.

"They have. Nineteen in all. I counted them," answered Hare.

The young woman burst out weeping afresh, and the wailing of the others gathered new impetus. Pondering upon this peculiar aspect of the case, Hare left the cottage and returned to his post behind the arbor. He picked up his rifle and hurriedly went down through the orchard to the hiding place of the horses.

Silvermane pranced and snorted his gladness at sight of his master. The desert king was fit for a grueling race right on the moment. Black Bolly quietly cropped the long grass. Hare saddled the stallion so as to have him in instant readiness, and then returned to the front of the yard.

He heard the dull hollow bang of a gun down the road, then another, and several shots following in quick succession. Wherever these shots came from they were fired indoors. Perhaps the rustlers were at their old tricks in the village saloon. A distant angry murmuring and tramping of many feet drew Hare to the gate. Riderless mustangs were galloping down the road; several frightened boys were fleeing across the square; not a man was in sight.

Three more shots cracked, this time clear and sharp. The low murmur and trample became a hoarse uproar. Hare had heard that sound before; it was the tumult of mob violence. A black, dense throng of men appeared crowding into the main street, crossing toward the square. The procession had some order; it was led and flanked by mounted men; but the upflinging of many arms, the craning of necks and leaping of men on the outskirts of the mass, the pressure inward, and the hideous roar made it a wild march.

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Hare. "The Mormons have risen against the rustlers. I understand now. John Caldwell spent last night in rousing his neighbors. In secret! They have surprised the rustlers. Now what?"

Hare vaulted the fence and ran down the road. A compact, annular mob of men, a hundred or more, had halted in the village square under the wide-spreading cottonwoods. Hare suddenly grasped the terrible significance of those reaching, rugged branches, and out of the thought grew another that made him run at bursting, breakneck speed.

"Open up! Let me in!" he yelled, to the thickly thronged circle. Right and left he flung men. "Make way!" His piercing voice stilled the angry murmur. Fierce men with weapons held aloft fell back from his face.

"Dene's spy!" rose the cry.

The circle opened and closed upon him. He saw bound rustlers under armed guard. Four still forms were on the ground. Holderness lay outstretched, a dark red blot staining his gray shirt. Flint-faced Mormons, ruthless now as they had once been mild, surrounded the rustlers. John Caldwell stood foremost, with ashen lips breaking bitterly into speech.

"Mormons, Dene's spy, who killed Holderness!"

They burst into the short, stern shout of men proclaiming a leader in war.

"What's the game?" demanded Hare.

"A fair trial for the rustlers, then a rope," replied John Caldwell. The low, ominous murmur swelled through the crowd.

"There are two men here who have helped me, befriended me. I won't see them hanged," declared Hare.

"Pick them out!" a strange ripple of emotion made a fleeting break in John Caldwell's hard face.

Hare eyed the prisoners.

"Nebraska, step out here," said he.

"I reckon you're mistaken," replied the rustler, his blue eyes intently on Hare. "I never seen you before. An' I ain't the kind of a fellar to cheat the man you mean."

"I saw you untie the girl's hands."

"You did? Well, if that don't beat — "

"Nebraska, if I save your life will you quit rustling cattle? You weren't cut out for a thief."

"Will I? I'll be straight an' decent. I'll take a job ridin' for you, stranger, an' prove it."

"Cut him loose from the others," said Hare. He scrutinized the line of rustlers. Several were masked in black. "Off with those masks!"

"No! Those men go to their graves masked." Again the strange breaking, almost a twinge of pain, changed John Caldwell's expression.

"Ah! I begin to see," exclaimed Hare. Then quickly: "I couldn't recognize the other man anyhow; I don't know him. But Mescal can tell. He saved her, and I'll save him. But how?"

Every rustler, except the masked ones standing stern and silent, clamored that he was the fortunate man.

"Hurry back home," called Caldwell into Hare's ear. "Tell them to fetch Mescal. Find out and hurry back. Time presses. The Mormons are wavering. You've got a few minutes."

Hare slipped out of the crowd and sped up the road, jumped the fence on the run, and burst in upon the bishop and his family.

"No danger — don't be alarmed — all's well," he panted. "The rustlers are captured. I want Mescal. Quick! Where is she? Fetch her, somebody."

One of the women glided from the room. Hare

caught the clicking of a latch, the closing of a door, hollow footsteps descending on stone, dying away under the cottage. They rose again in reverse order, ending in swiftly pattering footsteps. Like a whirlwind Mescal came through the hall, black hair flying, dark eyes beaming, with the same look, the same inarticulate cry of joy as when he had found her in Thunder River Cañon.

"My darling!" Oblivious of the Mormons he swung her up and held her in his arms. "Mescal! Mescal!"

When he raised his face from the tumbling mass of her black hair, the bishop and his family had left the room.

"Listen, Mescal. Be calm. I'm safe. The rustlers are prisoners. One of them released you from Holderness' clutches. Tell me which one?"

"I don't know," replied Mescal. "I've tried to think. I didn't see his face; I can't remember his voice."

"Think! Think! He'll be hanged if you don't recall something to identify him. He deserves to be given a chance. Holderness' crowd are thieves, murderers. But two were not all bad. That showed the night you were at Silver Cup. I saved Nebraska — "

"Were you at Silver Cup? Jack!"

"Hush! don't interrupt me. We must save this man who saved you. Think! Mescal! Think!"

"Oh! I can't. How shall I remember?"

"Something about him. Think of his coat, his sleeve. You must remember something. Did you see his hands?"

"Yes, I did — when he was loosing the cords," said Mescal eagerly. "Long strong fingers. I felt them, too. He has a sharp, rough wart on one hand, I don't know which. He wears a leather wrist band."

"Enough!" Hare bounded out upon the garden walk and raced back to the crowded square. The un-

easy circle stirred and swept open for him to enter. He stumbled over a pile of lassoes that had not been there when he left. The stony Mormons waited; the rustlers coughed and shifted their feet. John Caldwell turned a gray face. Hare bent over the three dead rustlers lying with Holderness, and after a moment of anxious scrutiny he rose to confront the line of prisoners.

"Hold out your hands."

One by one they complied. The sixth rustler in line, a tall fellow, completely masked, refused to do as he was bidden. Twice Hare spoke. The rustler twisted his bound hands under his coat.

"Let's see them," said Hare quickly. He grasped the fellow's arm and received a violent push that almost knocked him over. Grappling the rustler then, he pulled up the bound hands, in spite of fierce resistance, and there were the long finger, the sharp wart, the laced wrist band. "Here's my man!"

"No," hoarsely mumbled the rustler. Streams of sweat ran down his corded neck; his breast seemed to cave in.

"You fool!" cried Hare, dumfounded and resentful. "I recognize you. Would you rather hang than live? What mystery is here?"

He snatched off the black mask. The bishop's eldest son stood revealed.

"Good Heaven!" ejaculated Hare, stepping back from a livid, convulsed face.

"Brother! Oh! I feared this," groaned John Caldwell.

The rustlers broke out into curses and loud guffaws.

"See him! Paul Caldwell! A Mormon! Son of a bishop! Thought he was sheperdin' sheep? Haw! Haw! Haw!"

The denounced Mormon cursed in passionate fury

and shame. "Why didn't you hang me?" he cried. "Why didn't you bury me unknown?"

"Caldwell! This is hell," replied Hare, slowly coming out of his stupefaction. "To think you — why it's unbelievable. But you don't hang. Here, let me cut your bonds. Come out of the crowd. Make way, men!"

The silent crowd of Mormons with lowered and averted eyes made passage for Hare and Caldwell. Then cold, stern voices in authoritative questions and orders pronounced the opening of the grim Lynch-law trial. Leading the bowed, stricken Mormon, Hare drew off to the side of the town hall and turned his back upon the crowd. The continuous trampling of many feet, the harsh medley of many voices swelled into one dreadful sound. It passed away, and a long hush ensued in expressive contrast. This in turn split to a shrill, alarming outcry:

"The Navajos! The Navajos! The Navajos!"

Hare thrilled to that cry, and his wheeling glance fixed upon the eastern end of the village road where a wide line of mounted Indians, four abreast, was streaming toward the square.

"Naab and his Indians!" yelled Hare. "Naab and his Indians! No fear!" His call was very needful, for the inflamed Mormons, ignorant of Naab's pursuit, fearful of the hostile Navajos, were running about with drawn weapons.

"August Naab! August Naab!" went pealing out.

Onward came the band, Naab in the lead on his spotted roan. The mustangs were spent and lashed with foam. Naab reined in his charger, and the painted, desert-eyed Navajos closed in behind him. The old Mormon's eagle glance passed over the dark things dangling from the cottonwoods to the files of waiting men.

"Where is he?"

"There!" answered John Caldwell, pointing to a long, still form on the ground.

"Who robbed me of my vengeance? Who killed the rustler?" Naab's stentorian voice rolled over the listening multitude. In it was a hunger of thwarted hate that held the men mute. He bent a downward gaze at the dead Holderness as if to make sure of the ghastly reality. Then he seemed to rise in his saddle, his broad chest to expand. "I know! I saw it all! Blind I was, not to believe my own eyes! Where is he? That wild boy! Hare! Hare!"

Some one pointed out Hare. Naab swung from his saddle and scattered the men before him as if they had been sheep. His shaggy gray head and massive shoulders reached above the tallest there.

Hare experienced the cold, inward sinking sensation of fear; he grew weak in all his being. He reeled when the gray, shaggy giant spread a huge hand on his shoulder and with one pull dragged him close. Was this the kind Mormon, this craggy-faced man with the awful eyes?

"You killed Holderness?" roared Naab.

"Yes," whispered Hare's lips.

"You heard me say I'd go alone? You forestalled me? You took upon yourself my work? Speak!"

"I — did."

"By what right?"

"My debt — duty — your family — Dave!"

"Boy! Boy! You've robbed me." He waved his arm from the gaping crowd to the swinging rustlers. "You've led these white-livered Mormons to do my work. How can I avenge my sons — seven sons?"

His was the rage of the old desert lion. He loosed Hare and strode in magnificent wrath over Holderness and raised his brawny fists. His face was the color of

his waving hair. The fire of gloom in his eyes was that of the insane.

"Eighteen years I prayed for wicked men," he rolled out. "One by one I buried my sons. I gave my springs and my cattle. Then I yielded to the lust for blood. I renounced my religion. I paid my soul to everlasting hell for the life of my foe. But he's dead! Killed by a wild boy! I sold myself to the devil for nothing!"

August Naab raved out his unnatural rage in awed silence. His revolt was the flood of years undamned at the last. The ferocity of desert spirit spoke silently in the hanging rustlers, in the ruthlessness of the vigilantes who had destroyed them; but it spoke truest in the sonorous roll voicing the old Mormon's ungovernable rage. For it had the weight of years. It had the raucous sting of evil supplanting good, the recoil of a trampled snake, the evolution of a leaf into a thorn, the bitter, poisoned sap of lifeblood — all terrible attributes of the desert. It was death in life.

"August, young Hare saved two of the rustlers," spoke up an old friend, hoping to divert the Mormon. "Paul Caldwell there, he was one of them. The other's gone."

Naab loomed over him. "What!" he cried. His friend edged away, repeating his assertion and jerking his thumb backward to designate the bishop's son.

"Judas Iscariot!" thundered Naab. "False to thyself, kin, and God! Thrice traitor! Why didn't you get yourself killed? Why are you left! Ah — h! for me — a rustler for me to kill — with my own hands! A rope there — a rope — a rope!"

"I wanted them to hang me," hoarsely cried Caldwell, writhing in Naab's grasp.

Hare threw all his weight and strength upon the Mormon's iron arm. "Naab! Naab! For God's sake, hear! He saved Mescal. This man, thief, traitor, false

Mormon — whatever he is — he saved Mescal."

August Naab's protruding eyes were now blood-shot. One shake of his great body flung Hare off. He dragged Paul Caldwell across the grass toward the cottonwood as easily as if he were handling an empty grain sack.

Hare suddenly darted after him. "August! August! look! look!" he cried. He pointed a shaking finger down the square. The old bishop came tottering over the grass, leaning on his cane, shading his eyes with his hand. "August. See, the bishop's coming. Paul's father! father!! Do you hear?"

Hare's cunning use of his opportunity pierced Naab's blood-clogged brain. The Mormon elder saw his old bishop pause and stare at the dark shapes suspended from the cottonwoods, and hold up his hands in horror. By one accord, the watching Mormons closed up the gap in the crowd hiding the ghastly evidence from the bishop's gaze. August Naab unclenched his hold of Paul. His frame seemed wrenched by the passing of an evil spirit, by the recoiling from a glimpse of a fiendish world. The human had begun its influx upon the lion's rage. The love he had given his first-born, the agony he had endured for that son's fall and degradation resurged in his heart, uplifting him to divine understanding. The reaction left August Naab's face transfigured.

"Paul, it's your father, the bishop," he said brokenly. "Brace up! Be a man. He must never know." Naab spread wide his great arms to the crowd. "Men, listen. Of us Mormons I have lost most, suffered most. Then, hear me. Bishop Caldwell must never know of his son's guilt. He would sink under it. Keep the secret. Paul will rise again. He will conquer evil. I know. I see. For, Mormons, August Naab has the gift of revelation!"

XXI

MESCAL

Summer gleams of golden sunshine swam under the glistening red walls of the oasis. Shadows from white clouds, like sails on a deep-blue sea, darkened the green fields of alfalfa and moved across them majestically to climb the cliff. Circling columns of smoke wafted far above the cottonwoods and floated in the still air. The desert-red color of Navajo blankets brightened the grove.

Half-naked, bronze-bodied Indians lolled in the shade, lounged on the cabin porches, and stood about the sunny glade in idle groups. The war paint had been washed from their brown skins; a single black-tipped eagle feather waved above the band binding each black head. They watched the merry children tumble round the playground.

Silvermane browsed where he listed under the shady trees, and many a sinewy red hand caressed his long, silvery, flowing mane. Black Bolly neighed her jealous displeasure from the corral, and the other mustangs trampled and kicked and whistled defiance across the bars. The peacocks preened their gorgeous plumage and uttered their clarion calls. The belligerent turkey gobblers sidled about, ruffling their feathers. The blackbirds and swallows sang and twittered their happiness to find old nests in the branches and under the eaves. Overall boomed the thick, dull, bellowing roar of the Colorado in flood.

It was the morning of Mescal's wedding day.

August Naab, for once without a task, sat astride a great peeled log of driftwood in the lane, and Hare stood beside him.

"Five thousand steers, lad! Why do you refuse them? They're worth ten dollars a head to-day in Salt Lake City. A good start for a young man."

"No, I'm still in your debt."

"Then, share alike with my sons in work and profits?"

"Yes, I can accept that."

"Good! Jack, I see happiness and prosperity for you. Do you remember that night on the White Sage trail? Ah, well, the worst is over. We can look forward to better times. It's not likely the rustlers will ride into Utah again. But this desert will never be free from strife. There'll be strife of some kind. We Mormons first fought drouth and famine, the fierce wolves, then the Indians, then the rustlers; now will come something better, perhaps honest men seeking a livelihood. We must lend a helping hand where we can, yet be ever watchful of our ranges and springs. Even good and honest men must be pushed back. I see that will come in the future. Maybe it's only the nature of this desert. But I'm afraid it's true of human life."

"Tell me of Mescal," said Hare.

"Ah, yes, I'm coming to that." Naab bent his great head over the log and chipped off little pieces with his knife. "Jack, will you come into the Mormon church?"

Long Hare had shrunk from this question which he felt must inevitably come, and now he met it as bravely as he could, knowing he would deal pain to his friend.

"No, August, I cannot," he replied. "I feel — differently from Mormons about — about women. If it wasn't for that! I look upon you as a father. I'll do anything for you, except that. No one could pray to

be a better man than you. Your work, your religion, your life — Why! I've no words to express what I feel. Teach me what little you can of them, August, but don't ask me — that."

"Well, well," sighed Naab. The gray clearness of his eagle eyes shadowed and his worn face was sad. It seemed the look of a strong, wise man who began to listen to doubt and failure knocking at the gate of his creed. His gift of revelation betrayed some flaw in his ruling passion. But he loved life too well to be unhappy; he saw it too clearly not to know there was nothing wholly good, wholly perfect, wholly without error. The shade passed from his face like the cloud shadow from the sunlit lane.

"You ask of Mescal," he mused. "There's little more to tell. I've lied a few times in my life, Jack, and one of my lies was about Mescal's father. I said that I married him to Mescal's Indian mother. It's untrue. But no one dreams the truth. Mescal has no name."

"It matters not at all to me. But she must never find out."

"I deceived even Eschtah, who's a wise old Indian. The secret is mine and yours, Jack. Let it die with us."

"Yes. Her father — can you tell me more of him?"

"Little more than I've already told. He was a gentleman, a man of quality. I suspected that he ruined his life somehow and became an adventurer. His health was shattered when I brought him here, but he got well after a year or so. He was a splendid, handsome fellow. He spoke very seldom, and I don't remember ever seeing him smile. His favorite walk was the river trail. I came upon him there one day and found him dying. He asked me to have a care of Mescal. And he died muttering a Spanish word, a woman's name, I think."

"I'll cherish Mescal the more," said Hare.

"Cherish her, yes. My Bible will this day give her a name. She has blue blood, perhaps; we know she has the blood of a great chief. Beautiful she is and good. I raised her for the Mormon church, but God disposes, after all, and I — "

A shrill, screeching sound split the warm stillness, a long-drawn-out bray of a burro.

"Jack, look down the lane. If it isn't Noddle!"

Under the shady line of the red wall a little gray burro came trotting leisurely along, with one long brown ear sticking straight up, the other hanging down over his nose.

"By George! it's Noddle!" exclaimed Hare. "He's climbed out of the cañon. Won't this please Mescal?"

"Hey, Mother Mary!" called Naab toward the cabin. "Send Mescal out. Here's a wedding present."

With laughing wonder, the women folk flocked out into the yard. Mescal hung back shy-eyed, roses dyeing the brown of her cheeks, curious with the magic of a word.

"Mescal's wedding present from Thunder River. Just arrived!" called Naab cheerily, yet deep-voiced with the happiness he knew he would give. "A dusty, dirty, shaggy, starved, lop-eared, lazy burro — Noddle!"

Mescal flew out into the lane, and with a strange, broken cry of joy that was half a sob she fell upon her knees and clasped the little burro's neck. Noddle wearily flapped his long brown tail. wearily nodded his white nose, and evidently considering the incident closed, went lazily to sleep.

"Noddle! dear old Noddle!" murmured Mescal, with strange, far-seeing, thought-mirroring eyes. "For you to come back to-day from our cañon! Oh! The long, dark nights with the thunder of the river and the lonely voices! They come back to me. Wolf, Wolf, here's Noddle, the same faithful old sleepy Noddle!"

August Naab married Mescal and Hare at noon, out in the shade of the cottonwoods. Eschtah, magnificent in his feathered robes of state, stood up with them. The many members of Naab's family and the solemn-eyed Navajos formed an attentive circle around them. The ceremony was brief. At its close the Mormon lifted his face and arms in his characteristic invocation.

Happy congratulations of the Mormon family, merry romp of children flinging flowers, marriage dance of singing Navajos — these, with the feast spread under the cottonwoods, filled the warm noon hours of the day.

Then the chief Eschtah lifted his lofty, beaded, feathered, buckskinned form, and turned his stern bronze face and falcon eyes upon bride and groom.

"Eschtah's hundred summers smile in the face of youth. The arm of the White Chief is strong; the kiss of the Flower of the Desert is sweet. Let Mescal and Jack rest their heads on one pillow, and sleep under the trees, and chant when the dawn brightens in the east. Out of his wise years the Navajo bids them love while they may. Time flees, youth flies — and there is only remembrance. Boy and girl! ride out in the sun, watch the shadows change, see the stars come out, hear the storm wind roar.

"Mescal, the wife of a chief obeys and smiles in her hogan. She weaves the blankets, grinds the maize, and ever speaks softly and sings in the ears of her children. The shadow of no man save her husband falls across her door.

"White Chief, the desert is there; selfish men and fierce beasts, hunger and thirst; and you are a warrior. It is well. Eschtah speaks to a man. Let him learn wisdom. The whelp of a wolf, the spine of a cactus, the root of a cedar, all teach wisdom. Let him hide his home among the rocks, protect it with sharp and

poisoned darts, keep his water from sun and thief — that is the Navajo's wisdom. Long ago into the desert came red men and fought the tribes that were there. Then came the white man and the days of the Indian are as the evening shadows. More white men will come. They will fight for lands and cattle and water; they will cut the pines and the cedar, and dry the springs, and bare the slopes, and let the sun bleach the green spots into red desert. That is Eschtah's prophecy.

"Daughter of my race, White chief; receive the blessing of the Navajo. It is given. Eschtah's heart beats slow. Soon he travels the long trail down the painted sands to the place of his sleep. Eschtah has spoken."

Then Jack lifted Mescal upon Black Bolly and mounted Silvermane. Piute grinned till he shook his earrings and started the pack burros toward the plateau trail. Wolf pattered on before, turning his white head, impatient of delay. August Naab rested his great hand on Silvermane's neck.

"Jack, Mescal, I see — I see — a little black-haired Indian-eyed boy clinging to this stallion's silver mane, learning to ride like his mother."

Amid tears and waving of hands and cheers they began the zigzag ascent. Wolf led the pack train; Piute urged the burros with slap and call; Mescal held down her hand at the corners of the trail and met Jack's.

When they reached the old camp on the plateau the sun was setting behind the Painted Desert, a golden-shafted, red-clouded level. With fingers tightly interwoven they watched the color fade and the mustering of purple shadows.

Twilight fell. Piute raked the red coals from the glowing centre of the camp fire. Wolf crouched all his

long white length, sharp nose on his paws, watching Mescal. Hare watched her, too.

The night shone in her eyes, the light of the fire, the old brooding mystic desert spirit, and something more. The thump of Silvermane's hobbled hoofs thudded out in the darkness; Bolly's bell jangled musically. The sheep were bleating. A lonesome coyote barked. The white stars blinked out of the blue, and there was a soft rush of wind in the cedars.

THE END

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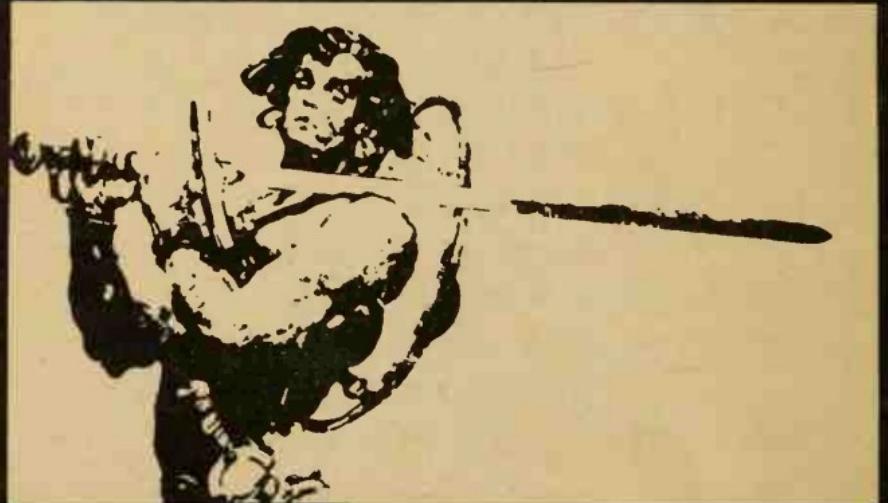
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LEFT FOR DEAD ON THE DESERT

the sound of an argument stung John Hare into life. He opened his eyes. The desert still stretched before him, the appalling thing that had overpowered him with its deceiving purple distance. Near by stood a sombre group of men.

“He’s the fellow sent into southern Utah to spy out the cattle thieves. He’s all but dead. Dene’s outlaws are after him. Don’t cross Dene.”

“I cannot pass by this helpless man,” a sonorous voice proclaimed.

“That’s well and good for you to say, holed up far off in your desert oasis, hemmed in by walls and guarded by your Navajo friends. But Holderness is creeping in on your water rights, and Dene will soon steal the cattle from under your eyes.

“There! Under the red wall! See the dust, not ten miles away. Dene and his band, see them?

“Don’t make them enemies, not for the sake of this stranger.

“Let him die!”